

WASTE BAN COMPLIANCE TIPS FOR COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES



College of the Holy Cross

WHAT ARE WASTE BANS?

Many businesses and institutions are not aware that a number of materials are banned from disposal in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) bans easy-to-recycle materials (like cardboard) from the trash. Your municipality might have additional bylaws/ordinances or regulations requiring businesses and institutions to recycle. Your campus, your waste hauler, and solid waste facilities are all responsible for complying with waste ban requirements.

See the RecyclingWorks website for an [overview on waste bans](#).

Colleges and universities that place banned items in the trash run the risk of solid waste facilities rejecting their waste, being charged additional fees, and receiving enforcement from MassDEP.

Businesses and institutions that receive MassDEP enforcement often already have a recycling program. However; a number of common issues can result in recyclable materials being placed in the trash, including:

- Breakdown in staff and student participation
- Poor signage
- Miscommunication with hauler about what materials go in each collection container
- Collection containers are not the right size
- Pickup schedule not properly set
- No backup plan for equipment failures

For colleges and universities, key waste ban materials include:

- Cardboard
- Paper
- Glass, Aluminum, Metal, and Plastic Containers
- Food waste (in excess of one-half ton per week)
- Construction and demolition materials
- Textiles, mattresses, and boxsprings

[Visit this site](#) for a full list of waste ban materials.



RECYCLING CARDBOARD AND PAPER

All recyclable paper, cardboard, and paperboard are banned from disposal, and more than 80% of all MassDEP waste ban enforcement is for cardboard! Clean cardboard is a readily recyclable material with well-established markets for processing. See the RecyclingWorks website for information on [how cardboard is recycled](#).

Talk to your waste hauler about options for collecting cardboard for recycling, such as:

- Compactor
- Dumpster
- Carts
- Baler

Material specifications could include cardboard only, cardboard mixed with paper, or single stream (cardboard, paper, and containers). Colleges and universities often save money on disposal fees when collecting cardboard separately. Institutions that collect cardboard separately must also collect recyclable paper from offices, classrooms, dorms, and other public areas.

Paper or cardboard that is contaminated with food or liquid waste should not be recycled. Waxed cardboard is not a waste ban material and also should not be recycled. Colleges and universities that collect food scraps for composting may be able to combine soiled paper, paperboard, cardboard, and waxed cardboard with the food waste. Consult your hauler to find out if this is an option.



RECYCLING BOTTLES AND CANS

Next to paper, bottles and cans are some of the most commonly recycled materials in the United States. Massachusetts waste bans apply to glass, metal/aluminum, and many plastic containers like beverage bottles. These valuable materials are often co-collected as part of a [single stream recycling](#) program on college and university campuses in Massachusetts. See the RecyclingWorks website for additional information about [collecting bottles and cans for recycling](#).

Ensuring that all recyclables remain uncontaminated by food, liquids, or tangles such as plastic bags is crucial. Plastic, metal, or glass containers should be thoroughly emptied and rinsed; minor residue is generally acceptable. Refer to the [RecyclingWorks graphic](#) on the best way to use plastic bag liners without contaminating the recycling stream.

DIVERTING FOOD WASTE FROM DISPOSAL

The MassDEP established a commercial organics waste ban in 2014 that required all businesses and institutions that generate one or more tons of food waste per week to divert it from disposal. In 2022, this threshold was reduced to one half ton. Use the [Food Waste Estimation Guide](#) on the RecyclingWorks website to anticipate whether it is likely that your campus' food waste exceeds the ban threshold.

Colleges and universities subject to the Massachusetts commercial organics waste ban should separate food scraps from trash and recycling. Food scrap collection strategies will vary based on a campus' available space, layout, and hauler requirements. Collecting scraps from prep stations using designated and frequently-emptied containers helps to reduce contamination and prevent pests and odors. In self-service cafes and dining facilities, or locations where patrons dispose of their own waste, offering consumers separate receptacles for food scraps, liquid waste (such as leftover soft drinks), recyclables (such as cans and bottles), and trash (such as plastic straws or wrappers) helps empower them to become part of the solution to wasted food. See the RecyclingWorks website for more information about the [array of options available to recover food waste](#).



University of Massachusetts, Amherst



Colleges and universities also have excellent opportunities to reduce food waste at the source by tracking wasted food and implementing adjustments in their food service operations. Many colleges and universities have reduced wasted food by more than 50% through these approaches! See the RecyclingWorks [Source Reduction of Food Waste Guidance](#) for more information.

And, when wasted food cannot be reduced, there are often opportunities to donate leftover food to food rescue operations. These strategies can achieve valuable environmental, economic, and social benefits! The RecyclingWorks [Food Donation Guidance](#), developed in partnership with state and local health officials, food rescue organizations, food banks, and organizations with established food donation programs, offers a broad overview for colleges and universities that are considering food donation.

Many colleges and universities have found that diverting their recycling and food scraps is either cost-neutral or helps save money by reducing disposal costs. The following case studies demonstrate how recycling and diverting food scraps can help improve operations in a college or university setting. Visit the RecyclingWorks website for additional examples of commercial food waste diversion case studies:

- [UMass Amherst](#)
- [Massachusetts College of Art and Design](#)

TEXTILES, MATTRESSES, AND BOXSPRINGS

Effective November 1, 2022, the MassDEP added textiles, mattresses, and box springs to the list of materials that are banned from disposal. Textiles include any clothing, footwear, bedding, towels, curtains, fabric, and similar products, except for textiles that are contaminated with mold, bodily fluids, insects, oil, or hazardous substances. See the RecyclingWorks website for additional information about [recycling textiles](#).

In addition to textiles, mattresses and box springs were also added to the list of materials banned from disposal.

Many colleges and universities, such as [Brandeis University](#), also have programs to promote reuse during move-in/move-out. Additionally, [Northeastern University](#) works with Green Mattress Recycling to divert mattresses on campus from the landfill. Mattresses include foundations or box springs, but not mattresses that are contaminated with mold, bodily fluids, insects, oil, or hazardous substances. See the RecyclingWorks website for additional information about [recycling mattresses](#).

DIVERTING CONSTRUCTION & DEMOLITION MATERIALS

Colleges and universities frequently undertake construction and renovation projects to improve campus facilities. Some of the common construction and demolition (C&D) materials generated from these projects are banned from disposal in Massachusetts. This includes asphalt pavement, brick and concrete (ABC), clean wood, metal, and clean gypsum wallboard. To comply with Massachusetts waste bans, make sure your hauler delivers C&D materials that are collected in a mixed dumpster to a permitted C&D processing facility. To increase the overall recycling rate for a specific construction project, consider staging separate collection containers for certain material types that are difficult to manage at C&D processing facilities, such as gypsum wallboard. See the [RecyclingWorks website](http://www.recyclingworksma.com) for additional information about [managing C&D materials](#).



Clean gypsum wallboard for recycling



HOW TO COMPLY

Identify what waste ban materials your college or university regularly disposes of, and work with your hauler to set up or improve your recycling program for those materials.

KNOW YOUR WASTE

You may not know exactly what materials are in your campus' trash bins. Take a look in your waste barrels and dumpsters to learn what waste ban items are regularly thrown away.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR HAULER

Talk to your waste hauler to find out options for adjusting your dumpsters/compactors so your campus can recycle all waste ban materials. When you set up or improve your recycling program, you will likely be able to reduce the size or pickup frequency of your trash containers.

Just as it is important to keep recyclables out of the trash, it is equally important to keep trash out of recycling containers. Work with your hauler to identify which materials are accepted at your recycling outlet and which are not. Common contaminants include food waste, plastic bags, Styrofoam, and rubber gloves.

Request that your hauler provide you with direct and immediate feedback on waste ban materials observed in your trash containers, contamination in recycling loads, or when they receive notice about waste ban failed loads from solid waste facilities. This is particularly important if your campus has a compactor or roll-off container, as drivers can observe and identify waste ban materials in these loads at the disposal site.

If you rely on equipment such as a baler or compactor for your recycling, talk with your hauler about back up plans to ensure that materials can continue to be recycled if equipment requires repair or replacement.

SIGNS

Clearly label all trash, recycling, and food waste containers. Customize these signs to include the specific needs and waste materials at your facility.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Regularly train staff on how to recycle and separate food waste. Watch the RecyclingWorks [Kitchen Source Separation Instructional Video](#) for tips on training your dining and custodial staff on how to collect food scraps separately from trash. For more information on working effectively with your hauler to set up a recycling program, see RecyclingWorks [Guidance for Businesses Contracting for Trash, Recycling, and Food Waste Services](#).

It is also critical to educate the campus community about your waste diversion program. MassDEP's [Recycle Smart MA](#) initiative is focused on putting the right materials in recycling bins and separating out "problem materials" such as plastic bags, food and liquids, and clothing.

Colleges and universities in Massachusetts can utilize Recycle Smart's educational tools and social media content to help improve the quality of recycling in bins located in public spaces and living areas on campus. The [Recycle Smart Partner Program](#) is free to join and open to any organization that wants to play an active role in promoting better recycling in Massachusetts.

RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts is a free assistance program that helps businesses and institution reduce waste, and maximize recycling, reuse, donation, and composting opportunities. Contact RecyclingWorks for customized assistance for your institution, including how to:

- Start or improve recycling
- Comply with Massachusetts waste ban regulations
- Find haulers and processors of recyclable materials
- Provide employee training and signage
- Save money on waste removal