



## Listen to the kids—compost



**San Francisco students say:**  
“Go for the green bin.”

**K**ids observe many things adults may miss.

In San Francisco and many communities across the nation, kids see what we do with our trash and its impact on the environment. And these children are speaking to the issue with knowledge beyond their years.

“Your generation will be retired, but my generation will be left to deal with this if we don’t fix it,” Aaron Knestaut, a Delaware middle-school student, told a panel of adults.

Inspired by recycling leaders like San Francisco, Aaron and three of his school

mates formed a zero waste team and for three months studied the disposal habits of families in their community. The students separated and weighed the contents of garbage cans and discovered that organic materials, such as food scraps and plant cuttings, make up as much as half of the discards people send to landfill.

Armed with data from their research and a passion to help protect the environment, the team won a \$25,000 grant to help convince Delaware communities to set up programs to collect organic materials at the curb and turn those materials into compost.

If this call to compost sounds familiar, your instincts are correct. San Francisco was the first city in the U.S. to put green bins in school cafeterias. San Francisco students began composting leftover lunches and snack scraps more than a decade ago.

It is now common for green bins at San Francisco schools to outnumber trash bins three to one and for school officials to instruct students to compost banana peels, paper napkins, and other food scraps and soiled paper.

A few years ago students in San Francisco asked their parents, “We compost at school. Why don’t we do it at home?” Now that virtually every property in the city has a green bin, everyone is encouraged to use it and sort correctly. Doing so takes but a minute and is one of the most effective things we can all do every day to help protect the environment.

Want reassurance it’s the right thing to do? Ask a kid. You may hear that compost gives farmers a viable alternative to using chemical fertilizers. Young people can tell you that every time we toss banana peels, coffee grounds, and other compostable materials in the green bin, we get closer to a world without landfills. They may even say getting to zero waste is not just something we want to do, it’s something we have to do.

## Help create 1.5 million new jobs—recycle

**W**e often think of recycling as the right thing to do to protect the environment, and that’s very true. But did you also know that the process of recycling paper, bottles, and cans is a powerful work engine creating steady, year-round, local jobs for San Franciscans and other Bay Area residents?

A major study conducted by the Tellus Institute two years ago found that by increasing the national recycling rate from 33 percent to 75 percent we could create 1.5 million new jobs in the U.S.

Reports published in recent weeks note that individual states, taking their lead from California, are creating tens of thousands of jobs by recycling more of their waste.

A Minnesota study reports that recycling supports 37,000 jobs in the northern state. Environmental Protection Agency statistics show 32,000 people in Florida work in recycling. Another report states recycling employs 85,000 people in California.

The Tellus study, titled “More jobs, less pollution: growing the recycling economy in the U.S.,” reported that waste



disposal generates a meager 0.1 jobs per 1,000 tons landfilled, but processing recyclables generates 2 jobs per 1,000 tons diverted from landfill disposal.

Economists tell us that creating jobs has a multiplier effect that benefits the greater economy. That makes sense as people with steady jobs are able to pay their bills, buy food for the table, and put money back into the local economy.

So let’s all put a little thought into what we are throwing out, toss a lot less into our trash bins, and recycle and compost as many of our discards as possible. Doing so will help sustain and create a lot of new jobs and help protect the environment, both things that improve lives.



# Put a blue bin, and a smaller trash basket, in your bathroom

American consumers are getting better at recycling in offices and at home in our kitchens. We put computer paper, empty cans, and pasta boxes in our recycling bins, and that's good news for the environment.

But what about the smallest room in the house – the bathroom?

A new study commissioned by Johnson & Johnson found that 40 percent of Americans toss empty shampoo bottles and other recyclable packaging from bathroom products in the trash.

It's a new year and a great time to make a change for the better by putting a blue recycling bin in every bathroom. Blue is the color of the curbside recycling bins in San Francisco and color-coding is a helpful reminder to sort items properly. Local hardware stores and other retailers sell blue bins in many



**Bottles, paper boxes, and other everyday items from the bathroom should be recycled.**

different sizes and shapes, or you can order them online. When you add a recycling bin to your bathroom, you can make the trash bin smaller. That encourages even more

recycling. And you will no longer have to walk through your apartment or house every time you want to recycle an empty lotion bottle, toilet paper roll, or empty plastic floss container.

The typical bathroom is home to a lot of bottles. Big or small, glass or plastic, when bottles are empty, please put them in a recycling bin. You can even leave the plastic caps on. Many bathroom items, such as bar soap, come in paper boxes. Please recycle those too.

Try this for a month and you will be surprised how little is in your bathroom trash basket. And please remember, everything we toss goes somewhere. It's up to you to decide whether that item gets recycled or goes to a landfill. Let's do the environment a favor by being sure all bathroom discards that can be recycled go into a recycling bin.

## Nice to know

We asked our recycling coordinators to name items people often say they are not sure they can recycle or compost. Here are the answers:

- **Aluminum foil** – Crush it in a ball and toss it in your blue bin. A special machine called an eddy current separator inside Recycle Central, the large recycling plant on Pier 96, repels aluminum cans and balled up aluminum foil off the sorting belt, sending them into a silo designated for aluminum. When full, the silo empties onto a metal “walking floor” that carries the separated aluminum to a high-density baler. The baled aluminum is sent to foundries and made into new aluminum products.
- **All glass and plastic bottles** – In San Francisco, unlike other cities, we recycle any kind of bottle. What's a bottle? Any container where the neck is smaller than the base. Please place all empty bottles in your blue bin.
- **Paper tea bags, including the paper tag and staple** – Put them in your green bin. Tea leaves are great feedstock for compost. Paper tea bags breakdown at our modern composting facilities.
- **Envelopes with windows** – Some envelopes still sport address windows covered with a transparent or translucent film to protect the letter inside. Envelopes are made of white ledger paper. Paper mills like that stock because it has long fibers. No need to cut out the window. The whole envelope goes in the blue bin.
- **Crab shells** – Now we're really talking. Fish bones and crab shells are a great source of nutrients and calcium. That makes better compost to help protect topsoil on local farms so they can grow healthy food for your table. Eat crab with sourdough and white wine. Compost the shells.
- **Used napkins and paper towels** – Like tissue paper, used napkins and paper towels are made of recycled paper and have short fibers. Once used, they are considered soiled paper. Toss them in your kitchen composting pail. They will absorb moisture and liquids,

which helps control odors. When your kitchen pail is full, put the contents in the green bin you place at the curb for weekly collection. The microorganisms in compost love the short paper fibers, so tossing napkins and paper towels in your green bin helps create even better compost.

To check what other materials can be recycled and composted go to: [WhatBin.com](http://WhatBin.com).

For information about where you can recycle things that would normally go into your black bin or can't go in any bin, such as fluorescent light bulbs, go to: [sfenvironment.org/recyclewhere](http://sfenvironment.org/recyclewhere).

### Torn or dented, put recycling in the blue bin

If a piece of paper is cut in half or if a metal can or cardboard box gets crushed or damaged, people are more likely to throw them in the black trash bin instead of the blue recycling bin. That is the finding of a study published in the December issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Remi Trudel and Jennifer Argo, working at Boston University and the University of Alberta respectively, conducted the study in five phases. The research caught the eye of journalist John Timmer who wrote, “Our sense of an object's utility, as well as our penchant for categorizing something as trash, feed in to whether people try to recycle it.”

Taking a good look at the material people throw in trash cans quickly uncovers evidence that supports these findings.

Timmer emphasized the importance of recycling, writing that we live in “a world with finite resources” and “recycling can save energy and avoid environmental disruption.”

This report encourages us to literally change the way we look at trash. Torn or balled up paper and crushed containers are important resources that need to be recycled. As the adage says: When we change the way we look at things, things change. Nothing going to landfills achieves zero waste.

