Dear CPS Green Leader,

Welcome to the Chicago Public Schools Milk Carton Recycling initiative! As part of our broader Environmental Action Plan, we are initiating this effort to reduce our impact on the environment and teach students to be good stewards of the planet. We’ve partnered with Environmental Impact Initiative on this guide to steer you through the process of recycling cartons at your school.

The carton-recycling process is fairly simple. Students will empty any excess milk, toss their empty cartons into a recycling bin, and discard remaining trash. But the benefits will be substantial. System-wide we can prevent 30 million milk cartons from going into landfills per year—that’s over 150,000 trash bags! More importantly, we will instill an empowering message in our students—that they can make a positive difference in their community and the world.

Whether you are a Principal, a School Engineer, a Teacher charged with coordinating the initiative, or an Area Facilities Manager, this guide will identify your role and responsibilities. Follow the step-by-step instructions and use the resources inside—they’ll arm you with all the information you need. Working together, we’ll make carton recycling a success.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Carlson
Director of Environmental Affairs
Chicago Public Schools

P.S. Stay in touch—we’ll be enrolling more schools and following up with Teacher’s Activity guides and other materials to integrate the process into classroom lessons.
Why Recycle Cartons?

Help CPS students take center stage in caring for the environment!

Few topics generate as much enthusiasm in schools, and at CPS, as environmental stewardship. We are greening our schools and have found another way to make a big difference: recycling our milk cartons. By helping us get carton recycling up and running at your school, you’ll enable CPS to achieve these goals:

- Reduce cafeteria waste and impact on the environment
- Help students develop good recycling habits and make a difference
- Reinforce classroom environmental messages
- Raise your Recycling Score and earn rewards
- Increase your school’s reputation for eco-excellence

Improper carton disposal carries many costs: it contradicts environmental lessons, hurts the environment, and increases waste-hauling needs. Ensuring that CPS’s milk cartons get recycled is best for everyone—our community, the environment, and most all, students.

Confident, green-savvy students

Children are all ears when it comes to the environment. By enabling your students to recycle their milk cartons, you reinforce lessons learned in class and help them develop good recycling habits early on. In-school recycling also provides a meaningful teaching context in which students can apply core subject skills in math and science to real-world problems. Finally, contributing to their school’s environmental achievements empowers students by showing them they can make a positive impact in the world.

So let’s get started! In the next section, we’ll show you how to start recycling milk cartons at your school.
How to Recycle Milk Cartons at Your School

In this “how-to” section, we identify roles and responsibilities for principals, area facilities managers (AFMs), school engineers, and milk carton recycling coordinators. You’ll find step-by-step directions, best-practice tips and resources for implementing carton recycling at your school. Use the checklist at the beginning of the guide to track your progress. And remember, you’re not only conserving land and resources by recycling cartons, you’re helping CPS students become good environmental stewards!

CPS Carton Recycling Implementation Process

1. Delegate Responsibilities
2. Anticipate Issues
3. Develop the Cafeteria Disposal & Dismissal Process
4. Assess & Obtain Resources Needed
5. Communicate the Program
6. Kickoff Day—Begin Recycling Cartons!
7. Troubleshooting—Evaluate Program

The carton-recycling process is fairly simple. Once disposal stations are set up (see below), students will empty their excess milk, toss their empty cartons into a separate recycling bin, and discard any remaining trash. If your school composts or recycles other materials, you may have additional bins. Custodians will bag the separated cartons and place the bags in recycling dumpsters for pick-up.

Cafeteria Disposal Stations

- Small Bucket or Container for excess milk
- Recycling Bin for milk cartons only—lined with clear or blue bags
- Garbage Can for non-recyclable lunchroom trash
To set up carton recycling in CPS schools, we’ll need cooperation throughout the system. In order to create a clear plan, we’ve divided responsibilities between administrative personnel (principals, teachers, cafeteria monitors and support staff) and operations personnel (area facilities managers, school engineers and custodians). With strong participation, you’ll be recycling in no time. Here are the primary responsibilities for key personnel:

**Principals**
- Designating a Milk Carton Recycling Coordinator
- Explaining the process to key staff, particularly cafeteria monitors
- Collaborating with School Engineers to develop and implement the cafeteria disposal and dismissal process
- Ensuring that the Milk Carton Recycling process is successfully implemented

**Milk Carton Recycling Coordinators**
- Coordinating with the principal to distribute school-wide communications about the process
- Coordinating instruction to students through cafeteria demonstrations and signage
- Supervising the recycling of milk cartons

**School Engineers**
- Answering the “Anticipate Issues” questions, p.5
- Determining and then obtaining any additional materials that are needed (trash bins, buckets, or dumpsters)
- Explaining the process and its operational responsibilities to your custodial staff
- Collaborating with Milk Carton Recycling Coordinators to implement the cafeteria disposal and dismissal process
- Overseeing the set-up of disposal and recycling stations
- Ensuring that custodians properly perform their responsibilities after implementation

**Area Facilities Managers (AFMs)**
- Informing School Engineers at designated schools of their operational responsibilities
- Following up with school engineers to ensure the process has been implemented
## 2. Anticipate Issues

Each school may encounter different issues based on its enrollment, length and number of meal periods, cafeteria size and configuration, and staffing. The Milk Carton Recycling Coordinator and School Engineer should discuss the process with any involved personnel in order to anticipate issues and develop solutions. We list likely concerns below along with lessons learned from other schools.

Efficiency is the most critical factor because of the short duration of most meal periods—usually 25–30 minutes. Without careful planning, the extra steps of dumping out excess liquids and separating cartons can create overcrowding and slow down dismissal.

Note: this guide is based on cafeteria-style lunch processes. If your school serves breakfast or after-school meals in a cafeteria, you can use the same processes for those meals. Schools that serve meals in the classroom may develop their own systems to recycle those cartons, but are not required to do so at this time.

### Concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will milk cartons smell or create vermin issues while they await recycling pickup?</td>
<td>As long as excess milk is thoroughly emptied prior to collection in the lunchroom and the collection bags are tied, smell and vermin have not been issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will the cartons need to be rinsed and/or dried?</td>
<td>No. If cartons are thoroughly emptied, dumping the excess liquids is sufficient. Custodians can poke small holes near the top of the bags of recycled cartons to enable air flow and minimize moisture build-up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will dumping excess milk create a lunchroom mess or slippery conditions?</td>
<td>In schools that provide sufficient buckets and create an efficient dumping and carton-collection process, lunchroom mess has been minimal. No slippery or other hazardous conditions have been reported. Dump-pans or funnel lids can be used with the buckets as an additional precaution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will there be enough time during lunch periods?</td>
<td>Yes. We’ve found that with an efficient lunchroom disposal and collection process, lunch schedules have not been disrupted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will the program create extra work for lunchroom staff?</td>
<td>During the initial days of the program, students may have questions and require guidance. As the newness of the dumping and collection process wears off, it becomes second nature to them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What if students throw other waste into the recycling cans?</td>
<td>Other materials sometimes find their way into recycling cans. But making an initial demonstration to educate students, attaching pictures or actual milk cartons to the recycling cans, and using student or parent helpers during the initial phase will reduce the problem.</td>
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Here are some other questions to consider in addition to those listed on the last page:

**Milk Carton Recycling Coordinators & School Engineers:**

- How many students are served per period?
- Do students currently dump excess liquids? If the cafeteria has disposal sinks, are they sufficient, or will you need buckets? (We suggest buckets for more than 50 students).
- What is the current cafeteria disposal process? How many trash cans are used?
- Does your school currently recycle in the cafeteria? How many recycling cans are used?
- How many disposal stations (excess liquid bucket, recycling can(s), trash can) will you need? We recommend one station for every 50 students served in a period.
- What are the best locations for your disposal stations? How can you best use your cafeteria space to create good traffic flow?

**School Engineers only:**

- If you need additional recycling cans or excess liquid buckets, do you have any on-hand that are not being used?
- Will carton recycling create extra work for the custodial staff? How?
- Is there room in your existing recycling dumpster for the new carton volumes between hauler pick-ups? Or will you need more frequent pick-ups or more dumpsters?
- Might fewer trash pick-ups or dumpsters be required? Once you’re recycling, consider adjusting your waste service.

**Milk Carton Recycling Coordinators only:**

- Who are your cafeteria monitors? Do they rotate? Cafeteria monitors must understand the process thoroughly so they can oversee and guide students.
- How orderly is your current cafeteria dismissal process? How can it be improved? How can you integrate the new recycling process to maintain timely student dismissal?
- Will carton recycling create extra work for cafeteria monitors? If so, can you minimize this by using volunteer or student help?
- Where are the best places to display signage to communicate the carton-recycling process?

**Best-Practices: Involve Students!**

- Involve students in the demonstration. Student leadership is vital to validate the process to other kids. It’s also an opportunity for students to emphasize what issues surrounding recycling they care about and to show that the process is easy…and “cool.”
- Successful schools have used student environmental clubs or “Green Teams” to help with the program.
- Art classes can create recycling-can signage and posters to communicate the effort and its benefits.
- “Clean Plate Clubs” encourage students to drink all of their milk and finish meals. Students with empty cartons can proceed directly to the recycling can, speeding their dismissal.
3. Develop the Cafeteria Disposal & Dismissal Process

The new carton-recycling process may fit into your current disposal and dismissal processes, or it may not. Your goal is to reduce lineups at that critical time when students dispose of their food trays and head outside to play or to the next period. You also want to maximize the environmental lessons to students by giving them an active role as possible. Here are some tips for developing your process:

- Students should empty their own trays. It’s not only the most efficient process—it teaches them to be environmentally aware and self-sufficient.
- The best disposal station set-ups locate excess-liquid buckets first, recyclables in the middle, and trash at the end. This puts recyclables in the forefront of students’ minds so they don’t toss them into the trash due to confusion or haste.
- Space the disposal stations throughout the cafeteria so students can freely move around them, and position monitors nearby to encourage timely flow and answer questions. Having multiple traffic flows improves efficiency and enables monitors to dismiss multiple tables or rows at a time.
- Once you set up your stations, make sure they stay in place—trash/recycling cans on wheels have a tendency to move around.
- For good traffic flow and less overcrowding, consider a “formal” dismissal process—by tables, rows, or some kind of order—that includes trash disposal. The discipline that students practice at meals may extend beyond the cafeteria.
- Make sure the excess liquid bucket set-up is height appropriate. For elementary students it can go on the floor. For older students it can go on a spare table, desk, or milk crate.
- In the first few days, consider “staffing up” with volunteers to help instruct students as they empty their trays.
- The dumping of excess milk is vital to the process—make sure that students are thorough. Dumping liquids removes weight from the waste stream, reduces waste-hauling needs, and minimizes the chance of contamination to the recyclables.
- Encourage students to finish their milk (and their lunches!) to eliminate the dumping step and reduce waste.
4. Assess & Obtain the Resources Needed

The most important resources to consider are personnel and basic recycling materials.

**Principals & Milk Carton Recycling Coordinators**

Additional personnel should not be necessary—carton recycling can usually be introduced into current cafeteria practices. However, some additional demands will be placed on staff, particularly in the early stages of the process. A Milk Carton Recycling Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating implementation and communication and for recruiting help for the following tasks:

- Creating and coordinating signage, memos and other communication materials
- Introducing and demonstrating the new recycling process to students in the cafeteria
- Supervising and “coaching” students after implementation

**AFMs & School Engineers**

The process requires these additional materials:

1) **Recycling Cans.** CPS Operations will initially provide one additional blue recycling can. If possible, differentiate your recycling cans from your trash cans by color—for example blue or green versus gray or black.

2) **Excess Liquid Buckets.** Used 5-gallon cleaning supply or paint buckets are readily available and work well.

3) **Plastic Bags.** Use *only* clear or blue plastic bags to recycle milk cartons. These bags will be identifiable for the recycler and prevent leakage. Engineers can order the blue or clear bags through the janitorial supplies booklet.

4) **Signs.** Hang clear, bold signs that show where to drain and recycle milk cartons over the milk carton recycling station.

In general, material needs will depend on the number of disposal stations (an excess liquids bucket, recycling can(s), and trash can) you decide on. Because of the extra steps involved for students, we recommend creating one disposal station for every 50 students.

Note that your school may need multiple bins at each station, so students can also separate plastic bottles, aluminum cans, and even food scraps for composting.

**Engineers should:**

- Identify current disposal practices. How many students are served? How many disposal stations are currently used? Then determine the number of disposal stations necessary for the new process.
- Assess existing resources on-hand (trash and recycling cans, dumpsters, and buckets) and request any additional materials needed before kick-off day.
5. Communicate the Process

Principals and Milk Carton Recycling Coordinators are primarily responsible for school-wide communication to staff and students. You may also want to publicize the effort to CPS parents to reinforce the message. Engineers are responsible for explaining the process to the custodial staff.

Staff Awareness
Staff participation is vital, and participation happens when people feel personally committed to a goal. You can gain this commitment with competent, considerate planning and clear communication of the initiative and its many benefits for students and the environment.

- Prepare a memo announcing the initiative to all staff.
- Principals, once you’ve developed your plan with the Milk Carton Recycling Coordinator, schedule a brief meeting with key personnel, particularly cafeteria monitors, to explain it.
- Keep staff and faculty posted on your kick-off date.
- Send an email reminder about milk-carton recycling to all staff before kick-off day to maintain awareness.
- Engineers, make sure custodians understand their responsibilities for process-related setup and cleanup before, between, and after meals.

Student Awareness
The better you prepare students with clear instructions, the smoother your recycling will run.

- Recycling Coordinators (or cafeteria monitors) should physically demonstrate the new recycling process in the cafeteria, with disposal stations in place, on the day you start recycling. Use an example lunch-sack or tray and thoroughly empty your milk, toss your carton in the recycling bin, and dispose of the trash. Be sure to convey the importance of the recycling initiative and instill a feeling of mutual responsibility in students.
- Make sure that visual reminders of the recycling process — signage — is prominently and clearly displayed, especially in the cafeteria.
- Reinforce the message with signage on the recycling cans — adhering a milk carton to the sign is effective.
- Principals should remind students of the effort on kick-off day with a school-wide announcement in the morning.

Parent Awareness
Educating parents about milk-carton recycling can also be helpful, both for reinforcement and to recruit parent volunteers to help out during the early stages. Many parents will be happy to be involved in the initiative and in their child’s environmental education.

Best-Practices: Clear Signage
Disposal stations should feature clearly marked recycling cans and excess-liquid buckets. You can differentiate recyclable cans from trash cans by color — blue or green vs. gray or black. Signs will illustrate the “Drink, Drain, Recycle” process:

1. “Drink” your milk.
2. “Drain.” Pour ALL excess liquid into the bucket.
3. “Recycle.” Toss milk cartons into the correct recycling can (no straws!).
4. Toss all non-recyclable trash in the garbage can.

It’s kick-off day, and you’re ready to go! Here’s what to do:

1. **Principals**: begin Kick-Off Day with a morning announcement reminding students and staff about the milk-carton recycling kick-off.

2. **Milk Carton Recycling Coordinators**: check that the recycling signage is properly displayed in the cafeteria and on recycling cans.

3. **Engineers**: check that custodians properly set up the disposal stations in the correct locations and that the special trash bags (clear or blue) are used to differentiate the milk cartons from trash or other recyclables.

4. **Milk Carton Recycling Coordinators or Cafeteria Monitors**: at the start of each meal period, briefly announce the milk-carton recycling kick-off and demonstrate the process for students, including thorough emptying of cartons. Also, inform students about any change to the dismissal process.

5. **Cafeteria Monitors**: as the meal period winds down, initiate as orderly a dismissal as possible to help students become familiar with the process. Help students recycle correctly and note any areas of confusion or changes to be made.

6. **Custodians**: monitor the recycling and trash cans and empty them as necessary. After the lunch periods, tie the clear or blue bags of used milk cartons. Then, toss the bags into recycling dumpsters for pick-up.

7. **All Personnel**: a short “de-briefing” among personnel can help determine any adjustments to make.

7. Troubleshooting—Assess Your Process

After you’ve implemented the milk-carton recycling for one week and made changes, bring together key staff to evaluate and determine what, if any, improvements to make. If helpful, talk to personnel at other schools to find out what’s working for them. Here are some questions to consider:

- Are students exiting in a timely way? If not, you may need more disposal stations, better traffic flow, or more communication.
- Are all or nearly all cartons being recycled—or do some wind up in the trash?
- Are any contaminants (straws, other trash) being mixed with the cartons?
- Are students thoroughly emptying their cartons?
- Is your staff having to do too much extra work? Why? Students should do their own recycling to reduce demands on staff. If they need help, use volunteer parents or student “green” teams to guide them.
- Are there differences between meal periods? Younger children sometimes need extra help, particularly while the process is new.

Congratulations! Your successful implementation of carton recycling will help CPS, its students and the environment. Keep posted for future, related initiatives, including classroom activity sheets and report forms.
CPS Carton Recycling Partners

The Carton Council is a group of packaging companies that seeks to improve the environmental impact of cartons by promoting carton recycling across the country, and by continuously improving the environmental performance of cartons. The members of the Carton Council are Elopak, Evergreen Packaging, SIG Combibloc, and Tetra Pak. For more information, visit www.RecycleCartons.com.

Environmental Impact Initiative (EII) is a nonprofit think-and-do tank that helps governments, schools, and businesses to implement emerging green practices and technologies. By bringing practical solutions to eco-ideals, we make green make sense for people and organizations. For more information, visit www.eiigreen.org.