

Best Practices Guide for Waste Reduction in U of T Residences



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Committee on the Environment,
Climate Change & Sustainability

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Introduction



Students conducting a residence waste audit in March 2025.

Purpose

This guide consolidates research-backed recommendations from past [Campus as a Living Lab \(CLL\) projects](#) and two residence waste audits conducted by the Student Leadership Subcommittee (SLS) of CECCS in March 2025. It is a student-led SLS initiative to improve waste diversion across U of T residences and support a campus-wide competition to recognize the most sustainable residence.

Goal

To provide clear, actionable strategies that residence teams can adopt to provide consistent infrastructure, clear signage, reduce contamination of recycling streams, boost diversion rates, and improve student awareness.

Background

Waste management systems vary by college and campus. Some residences use color-coded three-stream bins, while others use a mix of different bin types. Such discrepancies confuse students and reduce diversion rates. The lack of available compost bins throughout residence spaces also contributes to significant contamination of recycling waste streams.



Calling All U of T Residences

The Student Leadership Subcommittee of the Committee on the Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainability (CECCS) is hosting a competition to encourage the adoption of this guide.

Competition Participation

1. Review the following pages.
2. Fill out the form on this page, check off all actions your residence has either already done, started, or pledge to do as a result of this guide.
3. Submit the completed checklist and any supporting documentation (see appendix) to ceccs@utoronto.ca by **February 13, 2026**.
4. If your residence is taking additional measures to reduce waste not found in this guide, tell us about it for bonus points!

Each initiative/action/pledge will be worth one point. CECCS will conduct waste audits at the top two residences with the most points in March, 2026. The residence with the highest diversion rate will be awarded a celebration ceremony funded by CECCS, as well as bragging rights as the most sustainable residence!

Residence Name/ College and Address	
Contact name and email	
Number of residents	

☐

Check here if your residence includes a dining hall

☐

Check here if your residence includes the management of event space

Why This Matters

Improving waste management in U of T residences is essential for achieving the university's broader waste diversion goals and efforts to reduce our indirect [Scope 3 GHG emissions](#). However, recent residence-level waste audits revealed major gaps in infrastructure, education, and consistency.

Audit Insights

Audits revealed recycling contamination rates as high as 60–70%, a lack of compost bins outside dining areas, and more than half of landfill contents made up of materials that could have been recycled or composted. Students also reported challenges such as inconsistent signage, unclear bin labeling, and limited access to sorting information.



Students conducting a residence waste audit in March 2025.

U of T's current waste diversion goals cannot be met unless residence waste management practices align with larger campus systems.

- ☐ Ensure multi-stream bins for container recycling, paper recycling, landfill, and paper coffee cups (where relevant) are available on all floors or in high-traffic areas (student lounges, common rooms, cafeterias)
 - [Submit a service request](#) for new bins
 - See the [U of T Waste Management Design Standards](#)
 - Where feasible/necessary, increase the frequency of emptying bins
- ☐ Clearly label all bins with [standardized signage](#), and replace any outdated or faded labels
- ☐ Ensure all bins have stream-specific openings (e.g., round holes for bottles, slots for paper) where appropriate and practical



Water bottle refilling stations help reduce plastic water bottle waste.



Example of multi-stream bin system where each stream is clearly labeled with standardized signage and fitted with stream-specific openings to help reduce contamination.

- ☐ Install water bottle refilling stations to reduce plastic water bottle waste and ensure your residence is in compliance with [U of T's plastic water bottle ban](#)

BONUS POINTS: Tell us about other ways your residence is reducing waste and improving diversion through infrastructure:

Composting & Food Waste

- ☐ Ensure compost bins are available on all floors or in high-traffic areas (student lounges, common rooms, cafeterias)
 - Compost bins should be placed beside recycling and garbage bins to encourage proper use
 - [Submit a service request](#) for new bins

- ☐ Adopt a reusable container program (e.g. [OZZI](#), [Eco2Go](#), [Friendlier](#)), and make reusables the default option for both dine in and takeout meals

- ☐ Transition away from disposable food packaging and single-use plastics (using up existing inventory and purchasing more sustainable, reusable, or low-waste alternatives afterwards)

Examples of recommended replacements:

 - Sauce bottles instead of individual plastic packets
 - Salt and pepper shakers instead of single-use sachets
 - Reusable cutlery sets available at dining halls

- ☐ Actively discourage the use of online food delivery apps (e.g. Uber Eats, Skip The Dishes, Foodora, etc.)

Instead:

 - Promote dine-in incentives like loyalty stamps or student-choice nights
 - Use residence newsletters and posters to highlight the negative sustainability consequences of food delivery apps, such as unrecyclable waste, poor health and wellbeing, and exploitative working conditions
 - Feature specialty and rotating menu dine-in options and food content on social media



Example of a compost bin with clear signage to discourage contamination.

Composting & Food Waste

- ☐ Extend dining hall hours where feasible to allow more time for students to dine in rather than take-out
- ☐ Help address food insecurity by redistributing left-over food to students after dining hours through initiatives like [Victoria College's Eat After Eight Program](#)



Case Study: Burwash Hall's Eat After Eight Program

At Victoria College, the student-led Eat After Eight program provides students with free leftover food after 8:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The cost is partially subsidized by the Victoria University Students' Administrative Council, which pays 50 cents per meal for a maximum of 100 meals a week.

The CECCS Student Leadership Subcommittee can help connect you with levy student organizations on campus who may be interested in partnering with your dining hall on a similar initiative.

- ☐ If free redistribution isn't feasible, divert surplus food through collaboration with [Meal Care](#), [Second Harvest Toronto](#), [Too Good to Go](#) or other food rescue programs
- ☐ [Go Trayless](#) in dining halls to reduce up to 30% of food waste

BONUS POINTS: Tell us about other ways your residence is promoting composting and reducing food waste:

Washrooms

07

- ☐ Clearly separate paper towel bins and garbage bins
 - [Submit a service request](#) for new bins
- ☐ Clearly label all bins with [standardized signage](#) and replace any outdated or faded labels
- ☐ Remove paper towels from washrooms and replace them with energy efficient and low-voltage Dyson Airblade V hand dryers, as per the [U of T Caretaking Design Standard](#)
- ☐ Regularly check washroom sinks, automated taps, and showers for leaks or excessive run times to prevent unnecessary water waste



Energy-efficient and low voltage Dyson Airblade V hand dryer.



Example of a paper towel-only bin with clear signage to discourage contamination.

BONUS POINTS: Tell us about other strategies your residence is using to reduce washroom waste and conserve water:

Moving

- Promote the [Free Store](#) as a place for students to donate unwanted products and find needed items instead of buying new



The Free Store at 487 Spadina Cres. has a wide array of items from clothing, books, housewares, technology and furniture - all free of charge.

- Offer donation bins with clear signage on each floor or in high-traffic areas during move-in and move-out periods



Donation Drive run during New College Move Out by the Sustainability Office.

Moving

- ☐ Encourage residents to resell or offer for free unwanted items using Facebook Marketplace, Kijiji, etc. instead of throwing them away
- ☐ Promote the Sustainability Office's [Sustainable Move-Out Tips](#). This may include:
 - Adding poster signage to residence bulletin boards and high-traffic areas
 - Organizing a sustainable swap event in a common area where students can donate and pick up gently used items
 - Hosting a workshop about decluttering or donating items



Students moving into residence at UTM.

BONUS POINTS: Tell us about other ways your residence supports sustainable moving practices:

E-Waste & Special Waste

- ☐ Share information regarding responsible e-waste disposal with students, by either posting signage in high-traffic areas (student lounges, common rooms, front desks), or distributing emails to residences
 - See: [What we Recycle - Facilities & Services](#)
- ☐ [Submit a service request](#) for specialized bins, such as battery recycling or electronic waste, and place them in a central location such as residence lobby



U of T's Waste Management Supervisor explaining the process for recycling electronic waste at the St. George campus central recycling facility.



Example of a clearly labeled, designated specialty waste recycling station at UTM.

BONUS POINTS: Tell us about other ways your residence is addressing e-waste or other special items like batteries and ink toners:

Student Engagement



Provide new residents with waste sorting tools and information on correct disposal

- See: [What we Recycle - Facilities & Services](#) and [St. George Campus Waste Sorting Video](#)
- Have residence dons/leaders review this guide with residents during monthly floor meetings



Testing students on their waste sorting knowledge at UTSC.



Organize residence-based trivia events to test students' knowledge on proper waste sorting, composting rules, and sustainability facts, and offer cool prizes



Implement a loyalty-style card where students earn stamps for actions like returning reusable containers, sorting properly, or eating in instead of ordering takeout



Collaborate with student influencers, leaders and residence dons to make fun, short videos posted to social media showcasing sustainable habits

Student Engagement

- ☐ Encourage students to become certified [Sustainable Students](#) through U of T's Sustainable Change Program. Students can also earn credit towards the [Sustainability Citizen CCR program](#) by participating in waste reduction campaigns
- ☐ Organize internal floor challenges, so residence floors can compete with each other on who can reduce the most waste, or come up with the most creative waste reduction campaigns



Attendees pose for a photo at the December 2024 CECCS Winter Gathering, organized by the Student Leadership Subcommittee.

BONUS POINTS: Tell us about other fun or innovative ways your residence engages students in waste reduction:

Support & Training

- ☐ Staff have been consulted and informed on:
 - Changes to bin systems (e.g. adding compost bins)
 - Maintenance expectations for new infrastructure (e.g. hand dryers)
 - Communication tools to report issues with implementation

- ☐ Residence student leaders are trained to actively encourage proper sorting habits, and identify issues to residence management (e.g. unclear/faded signage, need for additional bins, overflowing bins that require emptying, etc.)



Students conducting a residence waste audit in March 2025.

BONUS POINTS: Tell us about other ways residence staff and student leaders are involved in supporting waste reduction:

Conclusion

Waste diversion is a shared responsibility. With students, staff, and sustainability teams working together, U of T residences can become models of environmental responsibility. This guide provides the tools. Let's make the change visible and actionable!

Need help with decision making beyond items generally listed on signs? Visit the QR Code below.



Questions or Concerns?

For questions regarding this guide, or issues with implementation contact ceccs@utoronto.ca. We want to hear about any barriers.

For questions about waste sorting, purchasing bins, service order requests, etc. at the St. George Campus, please contact Mike Medeiros at mikepereira.medeiros@utoronto.ca.

Appendix/Documentation

Use this section to add any photos or links to documentation supporting your submission, or any additional details. Email attachments will also be accepted. Photos may show the implemented best practices or other creative measures, such as:

- Standardized three-stream bins in multiple locations (e.g., lounges, kitchens, lobbies)
- Updated signage posted above bins
- Compost bin availability

To confirm the changes are residence-wide, you may wish to link to or attach a spreadsheet or log that lists:

- Which floors or areas have updated bins
- What type of signage was added and where

Infrastructure

Appendix/Documentation

Composting & Food Waste



Appendix/Documentation

Washrooms

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border, intended for documentation related to Washrooms.

Moving

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border, intended for documentation related to Moving.

Appendix/Documentation

E-Waste & Special Waste

Student Engagement

Appendix/Documentation

Support & Training

