

Recycling at Northwest High School

By Paige Finney, Anna Hansen, and the Editorial Team

Every day at Waukee Northwest High School, piles of potential recyclable goods are being dumped into trash bins. The improper recycling practices began before the opening of NWHS at Waukee High School.

Many observations about the current state of the recycling at NWHS have been made by students and staff, which has prompted some concerns.

Some of the processes observed included the custodians taking both the blue recycling bins and black trash bins from every classroom and dumping both into a single, larger bin, mixing both the recyclables and trash. This mix is then taken and thrown into the trash dumpster outside of the NWHS building. According to Garry Pickard, the Director of Operations for the Waukee Community School District, this is not the way the custodians are expected to be distributing the recyclables and trash.

Although this observation may seem like an error made by the custodians, the custodial staff have only been given a single bin to work with. According to a WCSD employee, the staff has been taught to empty the classroom bins into a single bin during their training.

After reaching out to WCSD's Day Custodial Supervisor, Rebecca Leanhart on November 4th and November 10th, questions were redirected to Garry Pickard.

Pickard was informed about the mixing of recyclables and trash on November 5th. As of December 8th, no visible changes seem to have been made at the school with recyclables.

Pickard stated, "I'll have blue recycle [bins] ordered so custodians can drag them around and empty the [classroom recycle bins]."

Additionally, upon examination of two outdoor dumpsters on November 3rd, it was clear that neither was being used as a proper recycling bin. Both dumpsters had many large trash bags, along with recyclable cardboard.

"If the recycling truck driver sees contaminants in the recycling bin, then it'll all just go into the trash," Pickard said.

Leanhart was the first to bring the lack of a recycling dumpster to Pickard's attention. Upon learning this, Pickard contacted Sparta, WCSD's waste and recycling management company. A dumpster labeled recycling was then placed the week of November 15th.

During the summer months, the amount of cardboard and recyclable materials was at a high level because of the various shipments of furniture and other materials for the new building. Kirk Johnson, WCSD's Chief Operations Officer, made clear that there was a contract that the furniture companies would provide a dumpster for the school. The furniture companies would then dispose of the materials from there.

One of the biggest issues is that the district is paying for these recycling services.

"For the dumpster company right now, [the school district] spend[s] \$1,600 a month on recycling services," Pickard said.

Johnson revealed that the cost is \$149 a month for NWHS recycling services.

Since the beginning of the school year, the district has spent \$9,600 on recycling services.

In the United States, \$11.4 billion worth of recyclable containers and packaging are thrown away each year. ■

*This information is accurate as of 12/12/21 at 10:05 p.m.