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We Recycle: Facilities Maintenance Supervisor Phyllis Meng, center, leads General Services army of custodians in the battle against waste. Working the frontlines in General Services' new recycling program are, front row, from left, Shanna Garney, Joel M. McIntyre, Eddie Harper, Valentina Garcia, Carlos Mayor, Mary Suniga, Guillermo E. Ramos and Rahmatollah Kangarloo, Back row, from left: Jackie Mitchell, D. Gatewood, Charles Webb, Richard Clements, Eugene Davis, Dolores Bocanegra, Timani Middleton and Jose Aguilar.

Photos: Gayle Anderson

General Services calling: Blue Bins arriving and not a scrap of paper too soon, Metro employees get set to begin comprehensive recycling program

- Green is busting out all over: Los Angeles County hosts major [Earth Day Conversation](#) at Metro on April 22; Metro Environmental Policy, [item 23](#) on the EMA agenda, wends its way through committee review, and General Services launches a DIY recycling program. We get to help.
- [How it works:](#) What goes where.

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(April 14, 2009) Although Metro is already harvesting decades of dividends accruing from the fundamentally green provision of public transportation, when the sun rises on Earth Day, April 22, more green shoots of a principled, comprehensive commitment to the environment are about to sprout.

Los Angeles County will host a major Earth Day forum at Metro as part of the [National Conversation on Climate Action](#), a nationwide initiative to engage communities in dialogue about climate action opportunities at the local level.

And, as Metro CEO Art Leahy makes his welcoming remarks to the confab of neighbors, businesses, schools and civic leaders gathered to discuss climate and



In the know: Jackie Mitchell

energy solutions, Metro employees will have the tools at hand to divert office paper and supplies away from the landfill and into recycling bins.

Metro, home to a workforce of some 9,000 employees, will launch the first phase of a revamped comprehensive recycling program designed and coordinated by General Services under the direction of Phyllis Meng, Facilities Management Supervisor. The program, which begins at Metro Headquarters, will extend to all divisions and facilities in planned phases.

The program makes it easy. Every employee will be issued a desk-side recycling container for used office paper and a desk-side trash can for items other than office paper or food-contaminated items.

Questions and answers

Q. What about all those gum wrappers, donut crumbs, lunch-soaked styrofoam containers, banana peels, plastic cups, soda cans and other food-stained remnants of modern civilization?

A. In this case, what happens in the cubicle does not stay in the cubicle.

Try the big, huge, FOOD WASTE TRASH CAN and/or the cans and bottles RECYCLING CAN in the kitchen area.

Q. How do the food-stained items get from the cubicle, meeting rooms or hallways and into the kitchen?

A. Employees are asked to break the cycle of contaminating paper with food-stained trash by taking their garbage to the kitchen trash cans. It's that simple.

Q. What is the ulterior motive?

A. Sustainability. For one thing, the cost of waste disposal is increasing due to limited landfill space, reports Meng. The most immediate and effective way to alleviate this problem, she said, is to recycle more paper (*keep food out of the recycle bins*), decrease its use (*two-sided printing works great, so does not printing out everything you read on the internet*), and re-use lots of things, such as rechargeable batteries, indestructible binders, hanging files and recycling toner cartridges.

Q. What's the one thing I can do right away?

A. Try this handy little tip from Environmental Studies 101: Bring your own cup.

As part of Metro's recycling efforts, custodians this week commented on some of the negatives of improper trash disposal, and also provided some important recycling tips.

At the top of the list of violations, they say, is when an employee dumps food and/or a cup filled with liquid into their personal wastebasket.

"It's frustrating sometimes when you see food in the recyclables. And then you have to take time and sort it out, you know, a lot of extra time," said Jackie Mitchell, custodian, building services.

Employees should use the general garbage can in the kitchen for food or other non-recyclables.

The problem is worsened by the fact that desk wastebaskets are not emptied every day, and old hamburgers, fruit and other non-recyclables are sitting in a wastebasket for several days.

"The next thing you know you might have the fruit flies flying in the air plus you know once the paper gets wet, the whole thing is contaminated and then you have to throw it all in the regular trash," said Eddie Harper, custodian, building services.

"If you're throwing food in there and then if you come back, it's going to stink --especially if it's going to stay there for four days," Harper said. "Just take your food to the kitchen."

The same problem occurs when people dump recyclables into the kitchen trash can.

As part of Metro's new recycling program, employees will have separate bins for paper and plastics, Mitchell explained.

"Right now we're trying to figure out the best location for the bins," she said. That should help with some of the effort since the process will become better organized, she said.

--from Laura Kloth

If you're counting your Starbucks cups and cardboard cup holders and little plastic lids floating into the trash can instead of sheep to get to sleep at night, give it up. The very fact that you, yourself, are reducing waste and contributing to healthier ledgers for the Office of Management and Budget will reduce your stress accordingly.

How it works

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Desk-side Trash Cans

Every employee will have a desk-side trash can.

- Black/grey bin solely for items **other than** used office paper and food and drink items.
- Examples of items: floor sweepings, metal binders, heavy metal fasteners, wood, ream wrappers, carbon paper, hanging file folders with metal bars, envelopes with "peel and stick" adhesives, non-paper envelopes, sheets of "peel and stick" labels, wads of rubber bands, restroom waste (paper towels, tissues, etc.), used bandages, broken glass, metal objects.

Desk-Side Recycling Containers

Every employee will have a desk-side recycling container.

- Deposit all used office paper into "Blue bin" containers marked "Recycling Only."
- It is the responsibility of the employee to make certain that only those types of office papers being collected are placed in the desk-side container.
- Examples of items: all colored and white bond paper, magazines, newspapers, envelopes (plastic window ok), manila folders, invoices, letterhead, stationary, brochures, note pads, etc.

Kitchen area of each floor - Food Waste Trash Can & Cans/Bottles Recycling Can & Battery Canister

Kitchen areas of each floor will have a large food waste trash can and a large recycling can for cans and bottles and a smaller canister for used batteries.

- Employees must walk all food items to Food Waste Trash Can and all drink containers to the Cans/Bottles Recycling Can in the kitchen areas of each floor
- Employees should rinse and deposit cans, bottles and glasses in the recycling containers located in the kitchen.
- Please: Batteries contaminate everything. Responsibly dispose of them in the special canister.
- Items contaminated by food and liquids should not be placed in the desk-side recycling containers nor the desk-side trash cans.
- Examples of items: banana peel, yogurt container, hamburger wrapping, carrots, apple, soda cup and straw, fast food to-go bag, used lunch napkins, etc.