



Plastic Bottle Recycling

Case Study: **Elmo's Restaurant, Durham**

Recycling since: Early 1990s

Type of Facility: Casual family restaurant

Serves: 6,000 Customers weekly

Recycles: cardboard, plastic and glass bottles and jugs, metal cans and newspapers

Average cost of services monthly:

- Container Recycling \$140 for 1 pick-up/week
- Cardboard \$50 for 1 pick-up/week
- Trash \$300/month for 2 pick-ups/week*

**cost of trash collection would increase if recycling was eliminated*

Interviewed:

Cammie, Mgr.

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Location:

776 Ninth St.
Durham, NC 27705

Description

Elmo's Diner has two locations and both have recycled from the beginning. While the city collects recycling from the Carrboro location, the Durham location has been open 10 years and contracts for recycling service on its own.

A combination of economic and philosophical drivers encouraged Elmo's to start recycling. The restaurant generates a great deal of recyclable materials, including many plastic milk jugs that result from serving breakfast all day. Even when crushed, the jugs take up a considerable amount of space. Elmo's knows it is better for the environment to recycle, and management finds that recycling definitely reduces the number of garbage pickups they have to pay for weekly.



Implementation

Employees put recyclables in one location inside and take them out behind the restaurant at the end of their shift. Containers are rinsed in a separate location and employees are encouraged to take materials out as needed so they don't pile up. Sorting has improved with practice, but container crushing is still a challenge due to time limitations. If containers aren't crushed, there is not enough room in the bins for a week's worth of recyclables.

Elmo's purchased seven outdoor recycling bins from their hauler, using roughly three to four for plastic, two for metal, and one for newspaper, all collected once a week. The restaurant even makes a concerted effort to recycle products customers bring to the restaurant for sharing (e.g., newspapers). Elmo's also recycles all of its cardboard boxes.



Results

Employees are shown the recycling location on their first-day tour and told what is and is not recyclable.

Management says not much effort is involved. "Servers have duties to perform at the end of each shift and one set of duties includes taking the recycling out. I don't think it is a favorite duty, but our staff is environmentally concerned."