

Best Practices

For Recycling Signage, Colour Schemes, and Bins

- The most important feature of a successful recycling program is organized, well-labelled and signed waste sorting stations.
- Giving people clear instructions through recycling posters on what to do with recyclable waste is critical for the success of your recycling program.
- Seeing consistent signage helps people quickly sort their recycling, reduces contamination, and increases recycling rates.
- The best way to introduce a new recycling program or disrupt the status quo of a non-effective recycling program is to use clear and impactful recycling posters and graphics.

Ready-made signs

Several recycling signage examples have been created for businesses and multi-family buildings to use for free. You can [download them here](#).

There are a few different signage options available:

- Simplified icons
- Photographs
- Single-stream (mixed) recycling
- Separated streams

No matter which signs you use, make sure they align with your recycling program before printing.

- If you find these signs do not match your recycling program, it is advised to make your own following the guidelines below.
- Your printer or print quality available may determine which signs will work best for you.



[Click to return to website and download posters](#)

Make your own recycling signs

Follow these 7 tips for effective recycling signage and posters:

(adapted from cleanriver.com)

1. Use images as well as simple text to help guide as many people as possible, overcoming language barriers.
2. Where possible, incorporate images of items frequently disposed of in your facility.
3. Maintain consistency throughout the building by using the same signage at all sorting stations, and using the same colour of bin to collect the same material type at all stations.
4. Keep signage simple and clear
5. Ensure graphics are clearly visible
6. Keep signage clean. Stained and ripped signs distract from the message they provide.
7. Update your recycling graphics regularly. Recycling programs are constantly changing. Remember to update your graphics whenever you make a change to help people adapt to the new guidelines.

For icons and photographs of commonly recycled materials, check out Metro Vancouver's [Recycling Signage and Colours](#) (icons and photographs), and [Canadian Plastics Industry Association – Image Bank & Resources for Municipalities](#).

Colour scheme

Most businesses and cities are now using a similar colour scheme.

Recommended basic colour scheme:

BLUE	GREEN	BLACK
Recycling	Organics	Garbage

Consider using the following colour scheme for a more comprehensive waste collection system:

RED	BLUE	YELLOW	GREEN	BROWN	GREY	BLACK
Needs safe disposal, not put with regular garbage	Mixed containers and/or other hard plastics	Mixed paper like mail, paper packaging, newsprint, phone books	Organics	Cardboard	Glass	Garbage

Recycling bins

- If possible, it is ideal to match your recycling bins to your colour scheme and keep them consistent throughout your building/operations.
- Best practice is to have one bin for each material stream at every sorting station to ensure people can dispose of materials correctly at each station. Small spaces will only require one station, while larger spaces with many rooms should look at having a station in each room, or locating the stations centrally in hallways to be easily accessible to multiple rooms.
- There may be different sizes of bins needed for different areas.
- Make sure that every recycling bin has a label on it around or near the opening of the bin, with signage placed at eye level above the bin.
- Check with your local office supply store, or search online to find and purchase recycling bins that fit your needs.
- Save money on bins by using waste sorting stations, rather than providing individual bins for employees at their desks or workspaces, where possible. While it may seem inconvenient at first, this encourages people to move about throughout the day which is good for their health. You can also save on cleaning costs, as cleaning staff will take less time to empty sorting stations than picking up garbage and recycling from bins scattered throughout a space.