



Sorting the waste from WOTO to check for contamination.

Compost Pilot and Waste Sorts at Wolverine Tower

Wolverine Tower was one of the first and largest U-M buildings to be fully engaged with the compost program. This made Wolverine Tower an ideal location to find out: What's working? And how much further can composting go?

By the start of FY19, every staff kitchen had compost bins, was committed to using compostable or reusable kitchenware, and had completed a "Where to Throw" training. In addition, the main hosting spaces had been set up as zero waste event spaces and composting was available in the cafe.



This pilot supports U-M's sustainability goal of reducing waste sent to landfills by 40%.

Waste Stream Analysis

An in-depth analysis of the building's waste profile in spring 2019 revealed:

- ✓ Extremely low compost contamination
- ✗ Potential for greater diversion of compostable waste, primarily food waste and paper towels
- ✗ Potential for improved sorting of recyclable waste, especially plastics

Pilot Programs and Education

The resulting actions included a restroom paper towel composting pilot, placing countertop compost bins in select common areas, focus groups to learn the barriers to composting food waste and better understand how staff deal with waste, and a refresher education campaign.

Results

A follow-up waste sort verified that these interventions increased waste diversion, increased compost collection, and reduced contamination.

- Restroom paper towel composting diverted an additional 5% of waste.
- Areas that increased the use of countertop compost bins in common areas collected more compostable waste than those with just kitchen compost bins.

However, the waste sort showed that while more education reduced contamination, nearly half of food waste and coffee grounds were still incorrectly placed in the landfill bins.



Bins in the cafe showed low contamination despite being located in an area at high risk for contamination.

Next Steps for Composting at U-M

- Education and engagement: focus on collecting ALL food waste in compost bins.
- Continue promotion of countertop composting in non-kitchen areas.
- Restroom composting: implement on a limited basis, relying on existing capacity.



The WOTO custodial team labeled all collected waste during the project, providing value information to the waste sort consultants.

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