

Applied Collegiate Zero Waste Principles

Zero waste represents a new means of elevating sustainability education and student leadership at the nation's 4,000 colleges and universities. Schools' valuable waste streams, significant purchasing power, centralized communication, and academic potential, place higher ed in a unique position to advance zero waste.

The term "zero waste" is often misunderstood and increasingly used without clear definition however. Fortunately, there are several colleges working together to refine a set of global principles that can guide and evaluate zero waste policies and programs established by schools.

The possibility of consensus around collegiate zero waste principles is on the horizon. College and university campuses are powerful engines for advancing zero waste because of their valuable waste streams, significant purchasing power, centralized communication and academic potential. In order to effectively take advantage of their unique position, it is important to establish a global understanding of the expectations and priorities of zero waste on campuses. Recycling Organizations of North America (RONA) is currently conducting a survey to begin to define a clear set of principles in order to guide and evaluate zero waste policies and programs at institutions of higher education. Input from the community is critical in this process, and can be recognized by participating in the survey. To access the short survey and be a part of the ongoing discussion surrounding zero waste principles, please visit: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/campuszerowaste>

At institutions of higher education, zero waste principles could include high levels of diversion from a waste stream and commitment to recovering the "highest and best use" of energy and materials from discarded products and packaging. Collegiate zero waste principles could also emphasize the importance of extended producer responsibility to include financial and physical responsibility for their product's waste. Companies doing business with schools are increasingly aware of the impact of their products and services. A growing number of companies are acknowledging financially and physical responsibility and are part of successful alternatives at colleges and universities.

Zero waste policies are at the cutting edge of sustainable practices both on campuses and in communities. A set of guidelines is needed to show schools what is expected when they commit to achieving zero waste. The results of this survey will help define zero waste as a viable standard to be executed globally, and will be shared through several national organizations including the National Recycling Coalition's Campus Council.