



CITY OF

Federal Way
PUBLIC WORKS

School Composting Toolkit



CONTENTS

FOOD WASTE COMPOSTING

- Organics Management Law
- Accepted Materials
- Background on Composting

STAFF ROLES

- Cafeteria/Lunchroom staff
- Kitchen staff
- Custodial
- Administration
- Teachers
- Student Teams

SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Lunchroom
- Morning Announcements
- Newsletter

Contact Us:



recycle@federalwaywa.gov



253-835-2704

Federal Way Schools

FOOD WASTE COMPOSTING

Washington Organics Law

The Washington State Legislature passed organics management laws in 2022 and 2024. These laws aim to divert organic materials, including food waste, away from the landfills through prevention, food rescue, and composting facilities.



Many businesses in Washington - **including public and nonprofit entities such as schools, churches, and hospitals** - must now arrange for organic materials collection.

Steps for Schools:

- 1 **Assess** when requirements apply, based on amount of waste generated (see state requirements on back page).
- 2 **Divert** edible food waste by establishing a Food Share Table.
- 3 Arrange for food waste **collection service** with a service provider (Waste Management or similar).
- 4 **Order cafeteria and kitchen waste sorting materials** including:
 - Food waste bins
 - Recycling bins
 - Signage
 - Liquids buckets
- 5 Coordinate **training** for custodial and cafeteria staff with service provider or City partner.
- 6 Arrange for school staff to **monitor the cafeteria waste stations**. Students can also be trained to support this work.



Washington State Requirements

Only businesses/schools located in a BOMA (Business Organics Management Area) that dispose of a certain volume of organic materials will be impacted. You can see the BOMA by scanning the QR code.



Businesses and Schools are required to comply with the following timeline:

Businesses/Schools generating at least...



of organics material waste per week must arrange for organics collection.

What are “Organic Materials”?



Organic Materials are substances derived from plants or animals. Each composting facility has different requirements and accepted organic materials. In Federal Way, Waste Management accepts yard waste, plants, all food scraps (including meat & bones), and uncoated paper products.

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Background

Every day, students make 14,500 tons of garbage-the same weight as 2,000 school buses! It is estimated that 44 pounds of food is wasted per student per school each year in King County.



Recycling and composting can greatly reduce waste in schools. Use this kit from City of Federal Way to ensure a successful collection program.

What materials are accepted?

There are three categories to sort and collect in school cafeterias: Recycle, Compost & Garbage.

- Recycle empty bottles, cans, clean paper, and cardboard.
- Compost food scraps (meat and dairy are fine), napkins, paper towels and pizza boxes.
- Throw away (garbage) all other items including milk cartons, plastic cups, plastic straws and utensils, plastic bags, candy wrappers, chip bags, bottle caps.

Green is for compost/organics

Blue is for recycle

Grey is for garbage



Food scraps + other compostable materials



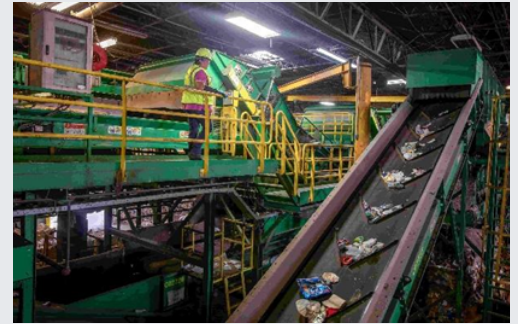
NO foam
NO glass
NO metal

NO plastic
NO straws
NO tissues



What happens to collected materials?

Recyclables are collected, sorted, and turned into new products. Items like cans are turned into new cans in about six weeks. Plastic bottles are turned into new bottles or other products such as plastic lumber. Paper and cardboard is turned into new paper products.



Food scraps and napkins are collected and turned into compost in just eight weeks! Compost is a valuable soil amendment that is used on local gardens and landscapes. Putting food scraps in the compost rather than garbage helps reduce methane emissions and conserve landfill space.

What is required in Federal Way?

- Schools and Businesses are required to compost due to State Legislation: HB 1799- Organics Management Law
- Recycling is required by City of Federal Way code 19.125.150(7)(h).
- Recycling at school events is required by the Department of Ecology.

What does recycling and composting cost?

Recycling and composting collection is available from a number of haulers in City of Federal Way. One choice is Waste Management, who is the City's contracted hauler. The City contract allows for recycling dumpsters or carts and composting carts at a rate that is less than garbage disposal. This means proper composting and recycling can reduce money spent for garbage costs.

Contact Waste Management to learn more - 253-833-3333

Contact Us:



recycle@federalwaywa.gov



253-835-2704

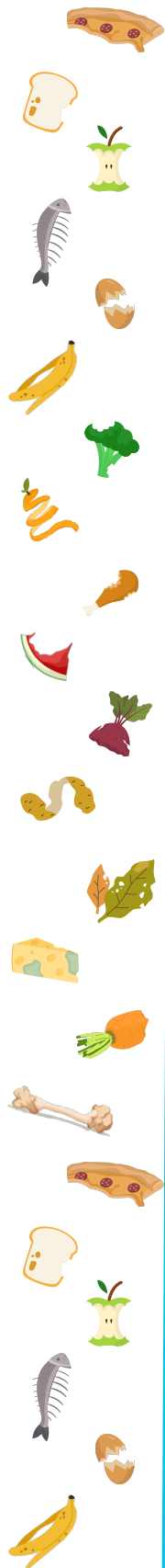


Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

Cafeteria Staff/ Lunchroom Support

- Review sorting signage to be sure you are an expert on what is recyclable, compostable and garbage. If you have any questions, contact recycle@federalwaywa.gov
- Make sure recycling, composting and garbage containers have signs on them with photos.
- If you display slides on a screen during lunch, add one about which items are recyclable and compostable. Use the actual container signs if possible.
- Help students know where items go and how to sort their own items after lunch. Some Cafeteria staff recruit students daily to stand by containers to help students sort. Student helpers point to where items go- they do not touch materials. They provide friendly assistance. It is key that student helpers know which items are recyclable or compostable.
- Make announcements while students eat, to help them know where items go. Consider making announcements at the beginning of the year- often- and again in January. Ideally every day you will remind students where items go. Using actual items to hold up- can be helpful. See example announcements from the City of Federal Way



Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

Kitchen Staff

- Review sorting signage to be sure you are an expert on what is recyclable, compostable and garbage. If you have any questions, contact recycle@federalwaywa.gov
- When substitute staff assist, be sure to help them know what containers are for and which items are acceptable for compost and recycling.
- Be sure you have blue collection containers for recycling with a sign on it and a green compost collection container with a sign on it.
- Break down boxes when finished with them. Work out how items are collected with custodial.
- Remember, no plastic gloves or plastic bags in the compost containers. No shiny paper (plastic lined) in the compost container.
- Custodial may line your compost container with a plastic bag. Know they will be emptying materials loose into the outside cart.

Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

Custodial - Setup

Review sorting signage to be sure you are an expert on what is recyclable, compostable and garbage. If you have any questions, contact recycle@federalwaywa.gov

Set up:

- Place blue recycling, green composting, and grey garbage containers out before lunch. Group composting and garbage beside each other since most items will be these two categories. Middle and high schools will have more recyclables- so you may want to add a blue recycling to your grouping. Since elementary schools will not have many recyclables in the cafeteria, it is ok to have recycling containers on the edge of the room.
- If students will be emptying materials down a line, place recycling first, garbage second and food composting last. Students will:
 1. Drop bottles at the first container- recycling
 2. Pick out plastic, milk cartons and garbage at the second container – garbage.
 3. Flip and tap their tray at the third container- food compost - to get items like mashed potatoes to go in the compost without having to handle them.



Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

Custodial - Sorting & Contamination

Sorting and contamination:

- Students are to sort materials themselves. Custodial is not responsible for picking out contaminated material from containers.
- If recycling or composting has more than a few wrong items in it- it is contaminated. 95% of material, by volume, should be correct to be able to empty it in recycling or composting. If a recycling or composting indoor container is contaminated, tie off the bag and throw it in the garbage. Let administrators know about the contamination so they can improve education efforts to correct issues.
- Be specific with contamination issues. For example, if students are throwing plastic bagged food in the compost, let administrators know those details so that education can specifically address that. Administrators would help educate students to empty food loose out of plastic bags and throw the plastic bag away.



Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

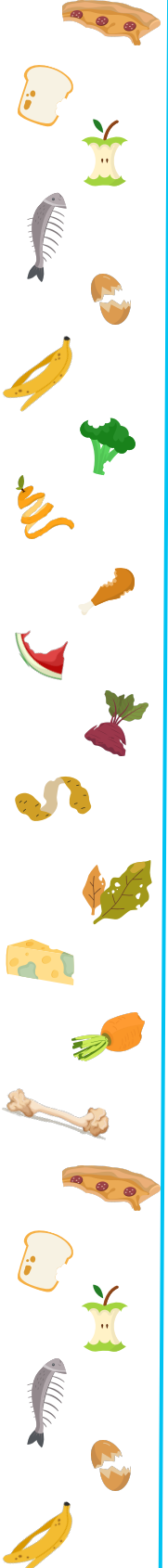
Custodial - Washing Carts

Washing carts or inside containers

- If you wash containers, water must be dumped into an indoor mop drain, NOT an outside storm drain. Storm drains empty directly to lakes and streams. Nothing but rain down the storm drain. Outside carts can be swapped for clean carts, if requested to WM. Most area schools do this once a year.

Health Department requirements

- Outside composting carts are not allowed to be rolled inside. They must stay outside.



Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

Custodial - Emptying Containers

Beyond the cafeteria:

- Composting may be collected in the staff room- if emptied daily. At this time, composting is not permitted in classrooms or restrooms (for paper towels.)
- Recycling should be collected and emptied from classrooms. Bottles, cans, clean paper, and cardboard can be included in classroom recycling containers.

Emptying inside containers into outside dumpsters or carts:

- Composting and garbage containers need to be emptied daily outside. Recycling can be emptied every other day.
- Plastic bags are great to line containers so that containers do not need to be washed out frequently. Plastic bags are not permitted in recycling or composting. The photo below shows how to line recycling or composting containers with plastic bags, dump material loose into the cart or dumpster (depending if it is recycle or compost) and then throw the empty plastic bag in the garbage.

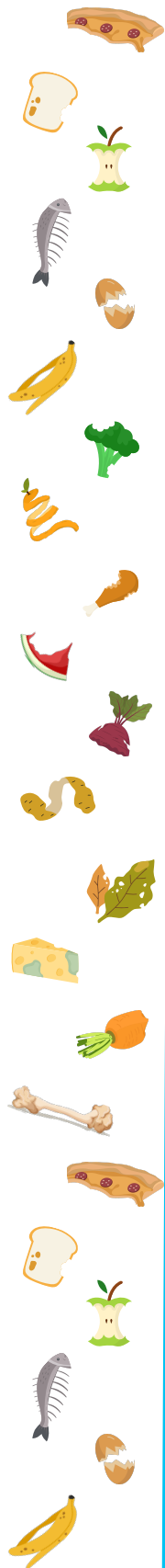


Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

Administrators

- Review sorting signage to be sure you are an expert on what is recyclable, compostable and garbage. If you have any questions, contact recycle@federalwaywa.gov
- Make sure all staff and students know that sorting recycling and composting is an expectation. Review this often.
- Beyond the classroom:
 - Composting may be collected in the staff room- if emptied daily. At this time, composting is not required in classrooms or restrooms (for paper towels.)
- Consider recruiting parent help for the cafeteria. This guide shows a sample parent request [New Composting Program at Puesta Del Sol](#)
- Include messages about what is recyclable and what is compostable in:
 - New staff information and orientations
 - Staff meetings.
 - Assemblies.
 - Parent and community newsletters.



Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

Teachers

- Review sorting signage to be sure you are an expert on what is recyclable, compostable and garbage. If you have any questions, contact recycle@federalwaywa.gov
- Federal Way School District has a PowerPoint that can be shown in classes to train students on proper sorting. The compost lesson is available on Canvas under Elementary Instructional Planning 2025-26 and Secondary Instructional Planning 2025-26. If not available, request this from the TFL department.
- Right now, composting collection is not in classrooms to be mindful of not increasing custodial workload since composting needs to be emptied daily. If your class has food waste that you want to compost, it can be placed daily in the cafeteria compost containers.
- Additional resources for teachers: Note these are not Federal Way specific and would need to be tailored.
 - King County resources: [extensive-resource-list.pdf](#)
 - Reducing wasted food curriculum; National: [Be A Food Waste Warrior](#) | [Educators Toolkits](#) | [WWF](#)

Federal Way Schools

SCHOOL ROLES

Student Teams- ASB, Leadership, Green Teams, Etc.

Students teams can help a lot at schools! Here are ideas to assist. We recommend picking 3-5 of these methods to help with in September/October and again in January/February.

- Announce recycling expectations at assemblies, especially at the beginning of the school year. Consider skits, large signs or props or contests.
- Include messages in PA announcements once each week or month.
- Make recycling and waste reduction announcements at lunch time.
- Stand by cafeteria sorting stations in pairs to help students know which items are recyclable or compostable. Do not handle lunch items, rather, point at where items go. Offer friendly assistance.
- Write an article for a student newsletter.
- Create posters for classrooms, hallways, and lunchrooms. Make posters about the benefits of recycling and composting. Most posters about which items go in recycling, composting or garbage. Consider taping actual items on sorting posters.
- Create a display of materials that can be recycled. Place it in a common area such as the library, lunchroom or main office.
- Hold a recycling contest during a school event to test recycling knowledge.
- Celebrate America Recycles Day in November and Earth Day in April.



Federal Way Schools

SAMPLE LUNCHROOM ANNOUNCEMENTS

Below are sample Federal Way announcements for compost programs kick-off. Point to each container as you discuss it and use actual items as props if possible!

- Our school is excited to have recycling and composting in the cafeteria! You will see blue containers in our lunch room for recycling and green containers for composting. Let's make sure we are experts on where things go!
- First let's talk about blue recycling. Raise your hand if the item I name is recyclable [say each one and pause for hand response]: Empty plastic bottle, empty aluminum can, sheet of paper, cardboard box. If you raised your hand for each of those items- you are correct! Give your self a pat on the back! These recyclable items are collected and turned into new bottles, cans, and paper! Remember, **ONLY** these items can go in the blue recycling container.
- The grey container is for garbage. Items like plastic utensils, straws, plastic bags, potato chip bags, candy wrappers, milk cartons, plastic cups are garbage and will go in the grey container.
- Let's see what goes in the green composting containers! First, what is composting? Guesses? Composting turns natural items like food scraps into soil to grow new plants! It only takes eight weeks to turn our old food scraps into soil. The soil is used to grow plants and new food! Items that go in the green containers are food you cannot finish (even meat and dairy) and napkins. Remember- **NOOOOOOO PLASTIC** in the compost. Most plastic goes in the garbage.
- Although composting is wonderful- remember- **THE BEST** thing to do with your food and with your drinks like milk is to finish them! Cows worked hard to make the milk you drink and farmers worked hard to grow our food. Try your best to eat what you have.
- Thumbs up if you now know which items are go in recycling or composting. If you ever have questions, please ask us. Great work everyone!"
- "Remember to sort your items correctly. The green container is for food scraps and napkins to compost. Remember – **NOOOOOOOO plastic** in the compost.
- The blue container is for recyclables. Only put empty bottles, cans, clean paper, and cardboard in the blue containers.

Additional examples can be found from [King County Green Schools](#)



Federal Way Schools

SAMPLE MORNING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Morning announcements

Our school now recycles and composts!
Remember to sort items correctly after you eat your lunch.

Green containers are for compostable items. Items to place in the green container are: food scraps- even meat, napkins, and paper towels. NOOOOOOOOOO PLASTIC. Items are turned into soil in just 8 weeks for flowers to grow!

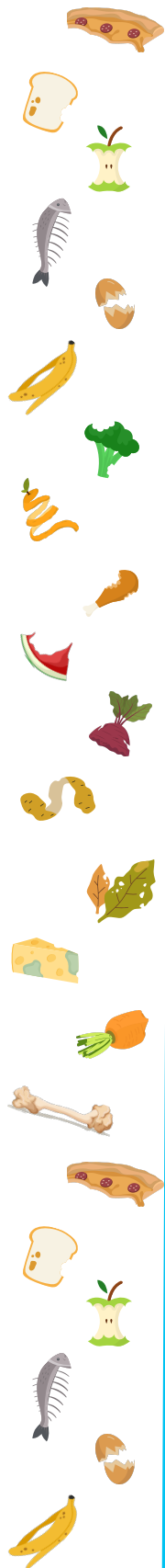
Blue containers are for recyclable items. Items to place in the blue container are: empty bottles, cans, clean paper, and cardboard. Recycling will turn these items into new items!

Grey containers are for garbage. Items that need to be put in the garbage are: milk cartons, plastic bags, plastic utensils, straws, potato chip bags, candy wrappers.

If you are not sure where something goes, ask a teacher, or look at the sign on the side of each container.

Remember- sorting is great- but the BEST option is to try to finish your lunch and drink your milk or beverage.

Thank you for doing a great job!



Federal Way Schools

SAMPLE NEWSLETTER

For newsletter or email to staff, students, or community members:

Recycling and Composting!

Our school now recycles and composts! Our cafeteria has new collection containers to help us reduce waste. There are new green containers for compost collection and blue containers for recycling collection.

Compostable items for green composting containers include food scraps (meat and dairy are fine), napkins and paper towels. Food scraps are sent to a local composting facility and turned into soil in just 8 weeks! Soil is used on local landscapes and gardens.

Composting is wonderful, but eating food and drinking milk or beverages is even better! Remind students to try to finish their lunch.

Recyclable items for blue containers include: empty plastic bottles, metal cans, clean paper, and cardboard. Recyclables are turned into new items.

Some items need to be thrown in the garbage. Items that are garbage include: milk cartons, plastic bags, plastic utensils, straws, potato chip bags, candy wrappers.

When packing lunch, consider waste free and reusable options: [Pack A Waste-Free Lunch | US EPA](#) Thank you for making a positive impact and reducing waste!



Resources

These materials were created by the City of Federal Way and Wilder Environmental Consulting to support school composting efforts in Federal Way. To access these materials online, visit uqr.to/compost or scan this QR code.



Many other resources exist that are available, but may need to be edited to fit Federal Way guidelines. Some resources we recommend:

- **Waste Management Federal Way**- The most up-to-date information for Federal Way accepted materials in recycling and compost.
- **King County Green Schools** -Green Schools Program helps school staff, district staff, and students understand sustainability. They provide tools and guidance for living more sustainably at school, at home, and in the community.
- **EPA Waste Reduction**- This page presents links to EPA resources on waste and waste reduction for school administrators, educators, and parents.
- **Ecology's Use Food Well**- Explore food waste prevention possibilities with Ecology's Use Food Well campaign.
- **WWF Food Waste Warriors**- Food Waste Warriors is a program for K-12 schools that provides grants, stipends, toolkits, and lesson plans to empower teachers and administrators in all schools to engage their students and take action on the issue of food waste.

Request Program Assistance!

Materials are available to schools, public and private, in the City of Federal Way. Connect with us using the information below.

Contact Us:



recycle@federalwaywa.gov



253-835-2704

