

UNIVERSITY of  
**HOUSTON**  
OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY

**MEMORANDUM**

To: LEED Certification Manager  
From: Gabriel Durham, Sustainability Coordinator  
Date: December 2020  
Re: Recycling Program and Policy—LEED MRp1

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Recycling on campus is a high priority at the University of Houston. In 2008, the UH Solid Waste Management Office created a comprehensive recycling program, which has helped the University's overall recycling rate reach 16.5%. Students, faculty and staff are encouraged to place recyclable materials into the ubiquitous color-coded "smart bins" on campus. Across its large campus and many buildings, UH employs daily collection of single stream recycling for paper, plastic, cardboard, glass, and metals. These recycling efforts average over 500 tons in general diversion from landfills annually.

UH Design Guidelines<sup>1</sup> require all new projects to include right-sized floor plan areas for the collection and storage of materials to be recycled. Design teams coordinate with campus Facilities Planning & Construction teams to determine whether a building needs an outdoor trash/recycling corral in addition to the interior storage area.



Figure 1 Public recycling collection bin.

UH encourages safe recycling of batteries, mercury-containing lamps, and electronic waste through the Office of Environmental Health and Life Safety (EHLS) and the Surplus and Property Warehouse (SPW). Departments are encouraged to collect and separate batteries into designated containers in building recycling areas. Students, faculty, and staff also can contact EHLS to pick up battery containers and mercury-containing lamps. EHLS sends these items for recycling through our third-party hazardous waste disposal contractor Veolia.<sup>2</sup>

SPW manages an on-campus storage facility for all state owned property that is no longer needed or wanted by campus departments. This facility includes furniture and all university owned electronics. UH has a contract with Bass Computer Recycling (an R2 and TCEQ certified electronics recycler) to recycle all non-functioning equipment. Additionally, staff can visit the SPW warehouse to acquire electronics that

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<sup>1</sup> Design Guidelines. (2020, January 28). Retrieved from <https://www.uh.edu/facilities-planning-construction/vendor-resources/owners-design-criteria/design-guidelines/>

<sup>2</sup> How do I dispose of batteries? (2018, January 3). Retrieved from <https://www.uh.edu/ehls/waste/dispose/batteries/>

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Figure 2 Electronics waste collection

are still operational, but that may have been moved there by a department that upgraded its electronics equipment.

Finally, special recycling collection programs occur on an annual basis. The Office of Sustainability runs special collections for electronics each spring semester, which diverts over 5,000lbs of electronics annually.<sup>3</sup> Student Housing and Residential Life at UH coordinates with a local textile recycling vendor each year during the Spring move-out, a program that diverts nearly 9,000lbs of textiles.<sup>4</sup> Information on the E-Waste

drive can be found year round at <https://uh.edu/af-university-services/sustainability/outreach-and-events/e-waste-drive/>

UH is an active member in the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and participates in the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) ranking system. Our recycling programs are a key part of the Gold ratings we have achieved since 2015<sup>5</sup>. Every garbage and recycling truck in UH's system is weighed for gross tonnage when tipped at the Houston MRF or landfill. Every three years, the UH Office of Sustainability audits these tonnage reports comparing the weight of recyclables to the weight of landfilled waste to document percentages of landfill diverted waste. Compost and construction waste are also included in this audit.



Figure 3 AASHE STARS gold rating emblem

The results and methods of the 2017 audit can be found here:

<https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/university-of-houston-university-park-tx/report/2019-01-04/OP/waste/OP-19/>. Metrics reported to STARS include the following criteria to calculate the total waste generated on campus: total materials recycled, composted, donated, post-recycling residual conversion, and disposed in a solid waste landfill. These figures are used to determine the total waste generated per “weighted campus user,” which is calculated using the total FTE enrollment, residents, FTE staff, and FTE distance-learning students. As of 2019, total annual waste generated per weighted campus user was reported as 0.12 tons.

**Gabriel Durham**

Sustainability Coordinator

University of Houston

<sup>3</sup> Durham, G. Residential Move out Recycles 8,960 Pounds of Textiles. (2019, May 16). Retrieved from <https://uh.edu/af-university-services/sustainability/news/articles/2019/03062019tracs11.php>

<sup>4</sup> Treviño, S. Annual Electronics Recycling Drive Continues At UH. (2019, March 4). Retrieved from <https://uh.edu/af-university-services/sustainability/news/articles/2019/03042019electronicsdrive.php>

<sup>5</sup> University of Houston STARS Scorecard. (2019, January 4). Retrieved from <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/university-of-houston-university-park-tx/report/2019-01-04/>