

What a waste: Audit helps improve campus recycling efforts

March 29, 2018 12:45 PM Grace Cushing
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From left, Tulane students Sloan Livaccari, Hannah McLaren, Olivia Boraiko and staff member Robin Rouquette work together to separate recycling from trash and vice versa as part of a campus waste audit sponsored by the Recycling Solutions Team at Rubbermaid. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano).

Tulane's Office of Sustainability recently partnered with Rubbermaid Commercial Products to find out just how much waste Tulane University produces.

Student and staff volunteers assisted in the completion of a waste audit where they sorted through trash and recycling collected from on-campus buildings in search of the most commonly disposed of items on campus.

Volunteers sorted through more than 143 pounds of trash and roughly 72 pounds of recycling. Single-use food containers, coffee cups, and single-use plastic water cups and plastic bottles were among the most abundant waste items.

Liz Pfafflin Hoekstra, assistant director in the Office of Sustainability, said the goal of the audit was to discover ways Tulane can reduce, reuse and recycle more.

“We also looked at whether or not the items being recycled are recycled correctly,” said Hoekstra. “This was a great opportunity for the campus community to reflect on their relationship to consumerism and waste.”

The audit results found that a surprising source of contamination for Tulane’s campus was liquid left inside bottles and cans.

“Finishing your drink or emptying your liquids before recycling bottles helps reduce contamination and makes it easier for custodial and recycling staff to handle,” said Hoekstra.

The event was sponsored by the Recycling Solutions Team at Rubbermaid, a group traveling throughout the United States to assist universities in commercial waste audits.

Rubbermaid has been performing waste audits at universities across the country as part of RecycleMania, an eight-week recycling competition among colleges.

Student volunteers will work together with Campus Services to develop a broader waste reduction and recycling program for Tulane in the future.

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Liz Pfafflin Hoekstra, Office of Sustainability

