



---

## Lunchroom recycling update – January 2011

---

In September of 2010, Mr. Kressler moved four recycling bins from the periphery of the cafeteria to the center aisle next to the trash cans. Making these bins more conspicuous and more convenient brought a welcome spike in the volume of water bottles deposited in the bins.

Over the next three months, volunteers from the PTO Environmental Committee observed the lunchroom activity, answered questions and intercepted water bottles that were heading for the trash. The volunteers also prepared the bottles for cartage by removing caps and emptying the contents.

**Financial benefit.** Today the program is running effectively, with 2,200 bottles deposited in the bins through the end of 2010. It cost the Town nothing to recycle those bottles, versus \$12 to trash them.

**Environmental benefit.** Bottles made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET) take up hordes of space in landfills and never decompose. Incineration is an alternative, but the best choice is recycling, as second-hand PET can be spun into spiritwear for your school or carpeting for your minivan, thus reducing our dependence on virgin PET, which is made from petroleum.

**Legal benefit.** The Town of Andover mandates recycling of PET, and the Massachusetts DEP has placed a waste ban on single-resin, narrow-necked plastic bottles.

There remains ample opportunity to perfect this initiative. First, we must continue to remind everyone -- students, faculty, staff, guests -- that recycling is righteous, it's the law, and it's easy. "Here's the bin. Use it. Please."

Second, we need to expand the program to include more recyclable containers. Unfortunately, the containers must be clean, and there's no quick-and-easy way to clean a pudding cup or juice bottle during the lunch rush; we'd need volunteers do the job.

Third, we need to refine the collection process. Tall bins are conspicuous but compete for space in a crowded aisle and are hard to clean. Smaller bins go unnoticed and get kicked around. Some have argued for recycling "stations" near the cafeteria's exits, so students can deposit their bottles en route to recess; others would like to see water bottles deliberately left on the tables for student volunteers to clear after everyone leaves. We're open to more suggestions.

*Brad Weeden*