

Eye on Campus

Recycling? It comes and goes with the wind

Campus seems inconsistent in effort to comply

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The plastic bags that students receive in the school bookstore proudly state, "Penn State Recycles." But to what Penn State are they referring? Not, it would seem, the one attended by students at the Delaware County campus.

Have you ever paused before tossing that Pepsi or Sierra Mist bottle in the nearest trash can to wonder, "Should I be placing this in a separate container?" Have you ever been printing in the computer lab and found yourself amazed by the piles of wasted paper? Have you ever questioned the amount of remaining newspapers left around campus at the end of the day? Have you ever asked, "Does Penn State recycle?"

If the university doesn't, then why not?

Penn State Delco is regulated by Middletown Township, which provides curbside recycling services for residential properties. The township recycling program states that "commercial facilities, institutions, and multifamily residential properties of more than four dwelling units are responsible for setting up their own recycling programs. Each facility must provide a report to the Township certifying on an annual basis the amount of recyclables collected during the year, along with certified weight slips indicating the amount of recyclables collected."

Penn State Delco, in this commercial facility, institution category, has not set up its own recycling program.

Penn State University's Administrative Policy Manual even has a policy about recycling, the purpose of which is, "to state the university's commitment toward the environment by establishing a Recycling Policy." Goals of the policy include "to ease the university's reliance on landfilling as the primary disposal option for the university-generated solid waste," and "to develop and implement a policy that will promote waste reduction at the university."

"At Main Campus," said senior math and physics major Christopher Neeb, "wherever there's a trash can, besides in the classrooms and bathrooms, there's a recycle bin for cans, glass bottles, glass, and newspaper. I think it's pretty effective, especially since

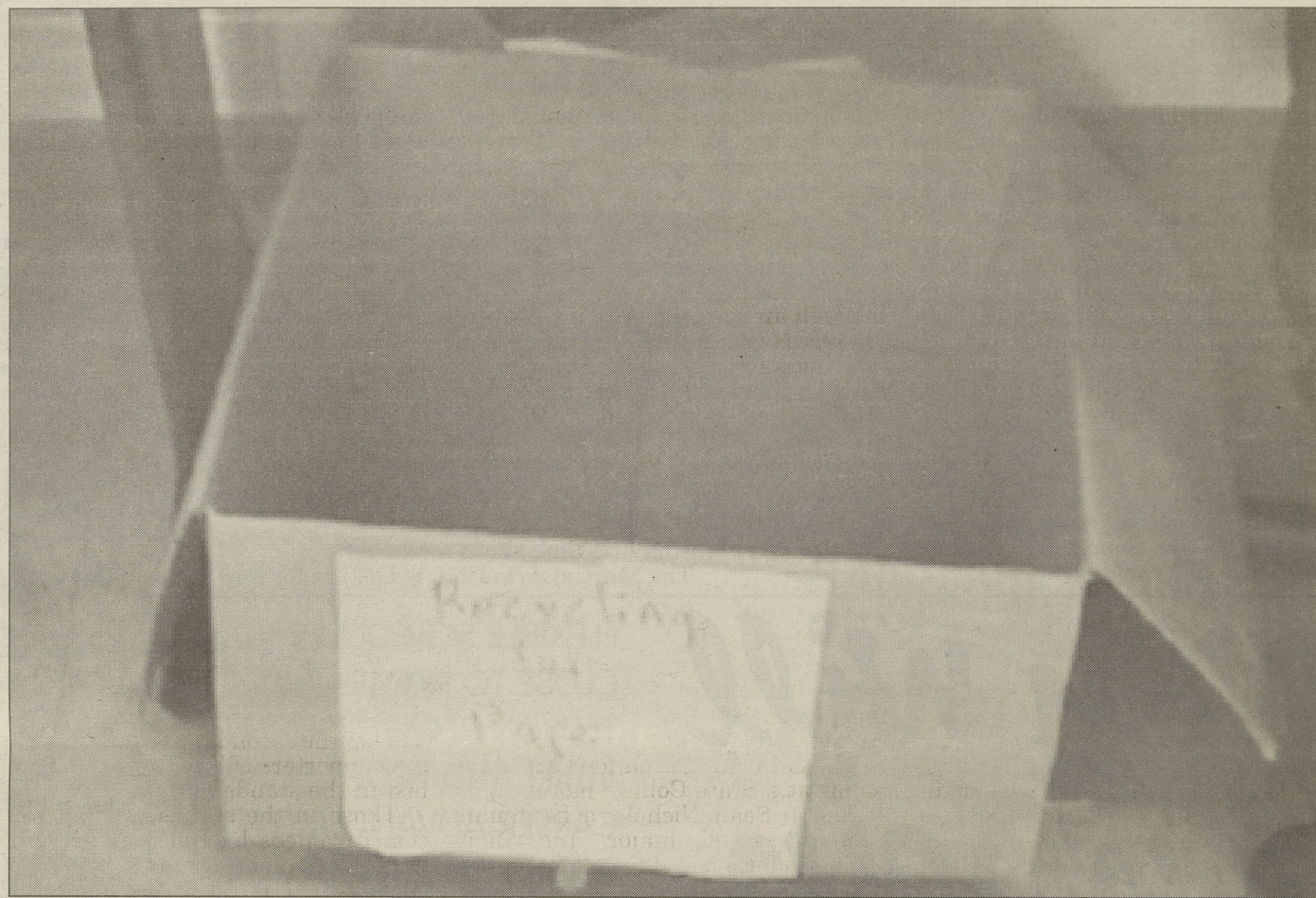


Photo by Matthew Kelly

In the club room on the second floor of the Commons building, a box for recycling paper sits empty underneath a desk.

they also have Pepsi machines dispensing both cans and plastic bottles and those newspaper things in every building, too. There's no effort needed to recycle anything, so most people do it."

Penn State Delco has the same Pepsi and newspaper machines, but lacks the recycling initiative of main campus.

"In my opinion," said Dr. David Macauley, assistant professor of philosophy and environmental studies, "the campus should definitely pursue a more robust, active and regular recycling program. There is actual or potential interest in the issue among students and faculty, and with some guidance and 'push' perhaps it could be instituted. I would love to see at least newspapers, paper, plastic and glass recycled on a regular basis. It would be nice, too, to have a place where used batteries could be deposited."

According to Lisa Yerges, director of business services at Penn State Delco, the campus contracts with Rapid Recycling, Inc. for the recycling of paper products. There

are waste containers in public spaces on campus (primarily next to the copiers in lounges), as well as in office suites throughout each building that are labeled for paper recycling. Janitorial staff empty these bins on a regular basis and place their contents in special Dumpsters outside of each building. For this recycling effort, the campus pays close to \$1,000 to Rapid Recycling on an annual basis.

For waste materials that are not paper but are dumped into the "paper" waste baskets and in turn to the Rapid Recycling Dumpsters, the campus is charged an additional service fee per occurrence.

Yerges explained that due to the volume of waste generated exceeding the capacity level of the janitorial department, not enough resources exist to sift and sort through what is placed in the on-campus Dumpsters.

"This is an ongoing problem," she said.

In 2002, Yerges submitted a proposal to University Park for funding from the university's "environmen-

tal fund" to purchase "special recycling containers, for interior and exterior use, to distribute throughout the campus."

The cost of these containers, equipped with specific slots for paper, plastic, etc., would be \$40,000. Yerges received word that the receptacle proposal would not be funded because "only proposals that dealt with 'environmental cleanup and compliance' would be funded on a priority basis."

Recycling containers at the Delaware County campus did not fall into this category.

Environmental clubs have sporadically existed at Penn State Delco.

Several years ago, a productive group of students organized an environmental club that collected plastic and aluminum recyclables throughout campus and delivered the materials to a nearby recycling center. An active environmental awareness group, however, has dissolved in recent years.

For now, it seems that a motivated student-run effort is the only way to bring efficient recycling to Penn State Delco.

"I would love to see our campus have an active environmental club again," said Yerges. "Unfortunately, signing a petition or talking about the need to recycle doesn't make it a reality. Obviously, it takes dedication, time, and effort."

It seems only a student-run effort will bring efficient recycling to the Penn State Delco campus.