



## SSAFE CASE STUDY REPORT Updating Plastic Recycling at Kendal at Oberlin

**Kendal:** Kendal at Oberlin

**Location:** Oberlin, Ohio

**Date Submitted:** 3/2/2023

**Key Words:** plastic, recycling, landfill

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**Summary and Objective:** It is now apparent that most plastics designated as “recyclable,” aren’t, in fact, recycled but are buried in landfills or warehoused in useless bales. Kendal at Oberlin’s Recycling Group tried to get our plastic collection in sync with the reality of the current recycling industry’s practices.

**Project Description:** The #1 – #7 plastic recycling system is no longer useful for guiding our recycling practices. This project was designed to incorporate the new information into the plastic collection in the 16 trash rooms at Kendal at Oberlin.

**Methodology:** The basic challenge was education of the Kendal residents. Our first step was to ask our local commercial recycler to present a program to the residents to explain the current state of plastic recycling and demonstrate what was and what was not actually recyclable. Before the presentation, we collected a large pile of different plastic containers on a table behind two receptacles, one clearly marked “recyclable,” the other marked “trash.” After introductory remarks, the speaker picked up each item and dropped it in either the “recyclable” or “trash” container, explaining why she made each choice. Residents were invited to bring their own items to the table and to ask questions.

We followed up several weeks later with a display in our main hallway. One end of a table was marked “trash” and contained a very large pile of non-recyclable items. The other end, labeled “recyclable,” had a comparatively small pile with the few plastics that are actually being recycled today. The display was attended by a member of our Recycling Subcommittee to explain the changes we were making.

Now, any items that are inappropriately put in a plastic recycle bin in the trash rooms are hung on the wall above the bin with a strip of packing tape and clearly labeled “trash.” We also put an article in the Administration’s weekly bulletin, going over the new plastic recycling guidelines.



# Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment

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**Funding Needed:** There were no significant financial expenditures.

**Involvement or Support of Community Administration:** Except for scheduling the events and the Administrative Secretary's willingness to print our reminder article on the new guidelines, Administration wasn't involved. As we turn to reducing the use of plastics in Kendal's food service operations, we will work with Dining Services.

**Key Challenges:** Many of us enjoy the good feeling of "doing our part" for the environment, and some folks are reluctant to accept the change. Also, the parameters of what can and cannot be recycled are not as clear as #1 - #7. For example, some #1s can be recycled while others cannot, so there is a confusion factor, too.

**Outcome and Follow-up:** We achieved our initial goal of better than 80% improvement in the collection of recyclable plastic, but we have an ongoing challenge to maintain that level of success.

**References:** The Greenpeace article, "Circular Claims Fall Flat Again Update 2022," <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/reports/circular-claims-fall-flat-again/>, is very helpful even though it spends much time discussing the official term, recyclable, and it has redundancies. The Appendix, which lists what items are accepted by each of the nation's Material Recovery Facilities, is interesting.

