



Eliminating the Waste in Waste Collection™

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- Gene Matthews, Director of Facilities Services
Case Western Reserve University

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Originally founded in 1826, Case Western Reserve is one of the nation’s leading independent research universities and home to about 16,000 students, faculty and staff. Its urban campus bustles across 178 acres in University Circle, a vibrant cultural district just five miles east of downtown Cleveland, Ohio.

Sustainability a core mission

Case Western has a strong commitment to sustainability, seeking initiatives that provide tangible benefits, engage and educate the community, and reinforce the culture of sustainability on campus. The University’s Climate Action Plan, a long range plan to reduce the campus GHG emissions, includes such elements as a 100 kW wind turbine and sponsoring the installation of a 60 kW solar array on the gym, as well as water and energy conservation, storm water management and waste stream reduction.

Waste collection and recycling are important and highly visible parts of that commitment – but the Facilities Services Department had its hands full keeping the busy campus clean and litter-free. Daily collection of trash from about 200 outdoor receptacles was a full-time job, made necessary to keep litter contained and potential food sources away from pests and vermin.

New initiative engages community, improves recycling

Gene Matthews, Director of Facilities Services, found a better way: his department installed 21 BigBelly solar compactors with companion recycling units in strategic locations around the campus as it arcs between the North and South residential villages, where the majority of trashcans were located. Each BigBelly waste station replaced six to seven of the older waste receptacles, which were a hodgepodge of styles. The units are spaced along the path in clear and convenient locations, and all older trashcans within sight of the main path have been removed. A few units were installed near the two main dining halls, the campus center, and the athletic facility.

“They have a consistent and clean look, and they don’t cost much to maintain,” said Mr. Matthews. “That consistent look helps aesthetics and makes the new waste and recycling stations familiar to users in the community.”

Recycling on campus has been much improved, both by reduced cross-contamination, and increased visibility and awareness to support initiatives like “Recyclemania.” “The BigBelly machines are great for communication,” Mr. Matthews said, boosting awareness and participation in the university’s recycling programs.

Highlights sustainability – and pays for itself in savings

“The BigBelly system provides secure trash containment and eliminated the need for daily collection,” said Mr. Matthews. The daily collection and changing of garbage bags used to be a full-time job. But now the facilities department can wait until the units are full – no need to empty for fear of litter or vermin, or overflow. That saves time and conserves trash bags. “We are able to reassign labor to more important grounds work, things like planting flowers, mowing grass and plowing snow versus having to pull trash bags,” said Mr. Matthews.

“Ultimately, we want to outfit the entire campus with these,” said Mr. Matthews. The university has 21 units now, and intends to get about 10 more to outfit the remainder of the campus. “We’re trying to create consistent, identifiable waste stations that reduce costs and showcase our commitment to sustainability,” he said.

As citizens of the larger community, Case Western is setting an example to promote sustainability. Because it is highly visible and people use the machines all the time, the BigBelly system engages people and helps to influence more environmentally-conscious behaviors. “The BigBelly system is part of the fabric of sustainability we are trying to weave.”

