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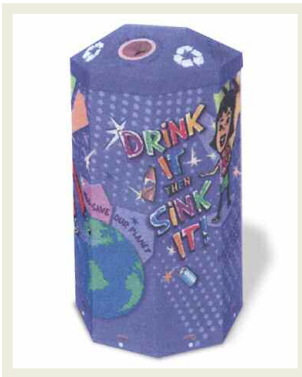
Knox County Schools program promotes milk consumption and plastic recycling.

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

In August 2005 Knox County Schools made the switch from non-recyclable paper milk cartons to kid-friendly, recyclable plastic bottles. The change was implemented to increase milk consumption and promote recycling in area schools. School Nutrition Director Mary Lou Henry made the move to plastic bottles in hopes of initiating a recycling program to reduce school waste in all Knox County Schools.

The SP Recycling Corporation and Knox County Solid Waste Division conducted a three-month recycling trial in 12 local schools during the 2005-2006 school year. The trial showed that recycled plastic milk bottles could be of acceptable quality and sufficient quantity to support a collection system.

In conjunction with the National Dairy Council, the Drink It Then Sink It! (DISI) program was developed in the Knox County School District. The DISI project partnership was formed in June 2006 for the upcoming school year. The partnership was in charge of setting goals and a timetable, making initial school visits, participating in school kick-off events, sending follow-up information and surveys to participating schools, initiating a poster contest and volume contest, and recording and evaluating collection data.



The goal was to have 40 of the 82 Knox County Schools participating in the recycling project during the 2006-2007 school year. To date, 37 schools are involved in the recycling of plastic. The principal, a recycle contact, a custodian and a foodservice manager make up the team that met with a partnership member at the start of the program to discuss a workable process for their school. In order to generate excitement, a kick-off was held at each of the 37 schools.

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Ongoing communication is maintained with the participating schools in order to manage the program. Seventy percent of the custodians and recycle contacts participated in a written survey to assess the progress. The survey comments were overwhelmingly positive.

Contests with incentives were created to promote recycling. The DISI program partnered with the 2007 Great American Cleanup and Keep Knoxville Beautiful campaign to create a poster contest to encourage recycling. An overall plastic recycling contest was initiated to increase the volume of quality plastic collected in order to reach the goal of profit sharing for the school district. A prize of a four-foot-long bench made out of recyclable materials was awarded to four schools in the district.

To date, the program has been successful, resulting in 22.39 tons of quality high-density polyethylene (HDPE) plastic being recycled. As a result, an estimated 204 truckloads of trash will be diverted from East Tennessee's landfill this year. Changing to plastic bottles had nutritional benefits as well. The switch increased milk consumption by 14 percent and meal participation by 11 percent.