

CAMPUS NEWS

ISU Partners with City of Pocatello to Streamline Campus Recycling

New two-stream collection system will simplify recycling on campus and give the community a transparent look at where campus waste really goes.

ISU Office of Sustainability | Pocatello, Idaho

Idaho State University's Office of Sustainability in collaboration with the Facilities team has launched a new partnership with the City of Pocatello aimed at making campus recycling simpler and easier to trust. Instead of asking students, faculty, and staff to sort materials into multiple bins, campus buildings will move to a two-stream system: one receptacle for trash and one for recycling. The City of Pocatello will collect both streams and handle the sorting, separating recyclable material into its proper categories after pickup.

The change is designed to remove a common barrier to recycling. When people are unsure which bin a item belongs in, they are more likely to skip recycling altogether or contaminate a bin with the wrong material. A simple trash-or-recycling choice, paired with a city partner equipped to sort materials correctly on the back end, is intended to raise participation while cutting down on contamination.

A More Transparent System

Pallavi Pokharel, Sustainability Manager for ISU's Office of Sustainability, said the partnership is built around transparency as much as convenience.

"One of the questions we hear most is, 'does my recycling actually get recycled?'" Pokharel said. "We want to answer that honestly. We are going to document how this waste moves, from the bin on campus to the collection truck to where it ends up. We plan to film that full journey and share it with campus so people can see the real outcome, not just take our word for it." Pallavi also adds that working with crucial partners like Chris Wagner, Director of Maintenance and Operations, Brad Paige, Custodial Manager, Schorzman-Wilson, Assistant Director of Operations, Housing, has been instrumental and will remain crucial for this partnership to materialize.

That documentation effort will follow campus waste through each stage of collection and sorting, giving students and staff a clear, evidence-based picture of the program's impact rather than a general estimate.

Part of a Larger Waste Strategy

The city partnership does not stand alone. It joins a set of existing sustainability efforts already underway on campus, including the Green Move-Out Program, which recovers usable items from residence halls at the end of the academic year, routine e-waste collection events for old electronics, and periodic thrift store pop-ups that give secondhand goods a second life instead of a trip to the landfill.

Together, the Office of Sustainability sees these programs as building blocks toward a longer-term goal: a durable, well-organized recycling system that extends beyond ISU's campus boundaries and strengthens recycling infrastructure across Pocatello.

"This is a bold step for us, and it is bigger than just putting new bins on campus," Pokharel said. "We are building a working relationship with the city that we think can grow into a long-term, community-wide recycling system. That is the piece we are most excited about."

Projected Impact: By the Numbers

The Office of Sustainability has not yet completed a full baseline waste audit for the new program, a step already planned under the Sustainability Action Plan. In the meantime, the figures below are early planning estimates only. They are built from an assumed on-campus residential population, national dorm waste benchmarks, and current e-waste and reuse program activity. They are intended to illustrate the scale of the opportunity, not to report actual measured results.

~4,500 lbs Estimated dorm waste generated per day, campuswide	~1,350 lbs Estimated recyclables diverted per day under the new system	~20 tons Estimated recycling diverted per month
~250 lbs Average e-waste collected per month at routine events	~8,000 lbs Estimated material diverted at year-end Green Move-Out	~191 tons Projected total waste diverted from the landfill, first year

The first-year projection of roughly 191 tons diverted combines four sources: an estimated 182 tons of dorm recycling diverted across a nine-month academic year, about 2,250 pounds of e-waste collected at routine drop-off events, roughly 8,000 pounds recovered through the Green Move-Out Program, and an estimated 8,000 pounds collected across quarterly thrift store pop-ups. The Office of Sustainability plans to replace these planning estimates with real, tracked figures once the city partnership's collection and sorting data becomes available, consistent with the waste-tracking system already outlined in ISU's Sustainability Action Plan.

Looking Ahead

The Office of Sustainability expects the two-stream system to roll out to high-traffic buildings first, with signage and a short campus education push to explain how the new bins work and where the material goes. Pokharel said the office will share footage and updated figures with campus once the first collection cycles are complete.

"We want this to be something the campus and the city both feel proud of," Pokharel said. "It starts with two bins, but the goal is a recycling system Pocatello can count on for years to come."