

## **Appendix N: Troubleshooting**

Sometimes, unforeseeable problems can arise once a school's waste reduction program is in place. Remember: no problem is too big to stop recycling!! Below you will find common program problems and solutions:

### **Contamination:**

**Contamination** (*see Glossary*) is a common problem for recycling programs. It primarily takes two forms:

- Recyclable materials thrown in the trash rather than the collection bins.
- Incorrect items thrown into collection containers (e.g., trash thrown into the recycling bins, aluminum cans thrown into the paper recycling bins).

A school's strongest weapon against contamination is education. Make sure all containers are clearly labeled. Hang signs describing your recycling program and indicating which materials are accepted in your program (*See Appendix H: Sample Letter to Parent or Guardian/Permission Slip, Appendix I: Loudspeaker Announcements, Appendix J: Sample Press Release*).

### **Liquid**

Excess liquid from beverage containers is a common complaint with plastic bottle and aluminum can recycling programs. To combat this issue, consider placing a bucket next to the collection container for students to empty remaining liquid. Place a large funnel over the opening of the bucket to prevent splashing or spilling. Empty and rinse the bucket daily. Some schools remedy the liquid problem by using mesh bags hung on racks to collect beverage containers. A tray collects excess liquid as it drains from the beverage containers. The tray is emptied and rinsed daily.

### **Pests**

If pests have become a part of your recycling program, make some slight adjustments to your program operations:

- ★ Make sure you empty bottle and can collection containers regularly.
- ★ Use plastic liners in your bottle and can collection containers.
- ★ If you currently store recyclables inside the school for hauling, consider storing the materials outside the school building.

### **Sustainability of the Program**

One of the biggest challenges for any school waste reduction program is retaining the interest of students and staff. It is not uncommon for school recycling programs to start off big and fade over time. Continued promotion is key for the sustainability of a school program. With a new student population each year, it is important to introduce them to the program. Keep people interested with contests, clubs, and competitions (*Appendix H: Sample Letter to Parent or Guardian/Permission Slip, Appendix I: Loudspeaker Announcements, Appendix J: Sample Press Release*).

Often, programs collapse when the recycling coordinator or team leader leaves the school. To maintain consistency, it is essential that a structured program be in place. This will ensure a smooth transition from one year to the next, and from one recycling coordinator to another. If you find that your school recycling program is having some problems, DON'T GET DISCOURAGED! New programs often have a few kinks. Keep in mind, no two waste reduction programs are exactly alike, so do what works best for your school. Good luck and remember—all your efforts are your school district one step closer to becoming waste-free.