

Drink Pouch “Upcycling” Brigade

September Upcyclers

A big thank you to our September Upcyclers:

Alyssa Buckner
Justin Hero
Zach Bath
Victoria Morrison
Eli Dove

Paige Irvin
Lara Whyne
Mac Godwin
Connor Conley
Troy Bankus

Trevor Yurkin
Meredythe Baird
James Mitchell
Troy Vankevich

A special thanks to all of our wonderful staff who assist with lunch duty who have supported this new project!

Each month we will have new student upcyclers during lunch time. All students are encouraged to bring in drink pouches from home and upcycle on their way to lunch anytime.

We have collected 253 drink pouches as of September 17th! We have already reached our goal of 250!

Way to go Eco-Warriors! Let’s see how long it takes to collect another 250.



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By: Rory Sweeney

Having removed plastic bottles and aluminum cans from the trash through recycling, students at Bear Creek Community Charter School are now tackling another type of packaging that clogs landfills: the shiny silver pouches that hold drink products like Capri Sun and Kool-Aid.

For years, such products weren't considered recyclable, but a New Jersey company has found a way to keep them out of the garbage. Even more interesting is what's done with them.

"Usually with recycling, they take the products and make the same products out of them," said Paula Longo, the school's environmental initiatives coordinator. That often means the recycled material has to be broken down and remanufactured, which uses energy.

But Terracycle makes products directly out of the discarded packages, and it's found some big-time support from sponsors like Kraft, Frito-Lay and Nabisco.

"It's actually called upcycling because they make new products out of them. ... They just clean up the drink pouches and sew them into backpacks," she said.

And it's not just for drink pouches: cookie wrappers are turned into kites, energy-bar wrappers into decorative bows for presents, and chip bags into totes, messenger bags and boxes for tiny speakers.

The company relies on sponsorships from various large members of the food industry, but its model also calls on environmental volunteers to collect and mail in the discarded items. Shipping is paid for and each collected item earns two pennies for a charity of choice.

"We're going to turn around and use that for our school garden or some other initiatives," including compost piles, Longo said.

She has students collect the pouches during each lunch period and put them into a container. Coincidentally, the school sells drinks in the pouches, but students also are encouraged to bring in items. "I saw one boy today bring in a whole brown paper bag of them already. They're already bringing them in from home, which I was happy and surprised about," she said.

The program is a bit constricted in that organizations can send in only items they've signed up to collect, and many programs are currently full. Longo would like to collect chip bags when a spot opens up. It's also unclear whether an organization will be credited for sending in packaging from companies other than its sponsors.

Still, Longo feels it's not only a step in the right direction, but a good example for others. "It's very, very easy and I'm hoping that with our school starting, other schools will catch on. ... It would be nice for it to spread," she said.

If popularity with the students is any indication, it should. "They wanted to buy the products from me at that moment," Longo said of the students' response when she described what was made from the trash. "If we could start with them, and they can get this education now, it'll make for a much greener future."

To find out more about Terracycle, the upcycling company, go to: www.terracycle.net. To see a list of upcycled products for sale, go to: www.shoponlygreen.com.

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