Construction Waste Diversion Programme

SDG focus

☒ Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production

What did you do?

Georgian College's construction waste diversion program ensures that materials from capital and renovation projects are properly sorted on-site and sent to appropriate recycling and recovery facilities. Contractors are required to separate wood, metal, cardboard, drywall, concrete, and garbage into designated bins supplied by a specialized hauler. Wood is sent to facilities where it is chipped for mulch or biofuel; metal is taken to scrap yards for reprocessing; cardboard is baled and recycled; drywall is broken down for reuse in manufacturing; and concrete is crushed for aggregate use. Materials are tracked by weight, and haulers provide detailed diversion reports for each project. These requirements are embedded in tender documents and reinforced through project manager training and contractor meetings. The program has achieved an average diversion rate of over 85% and directly supports UN SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. It reflects Georgian's commitment to reducing waste, conserving resources, and promoting responsible construction practices.

Image: Sign on project hoarding wall to inform staff and students of construction waste diversion rate and correlation with UN SDGs.

What were the benefits and outcomes?

1. **High Waste Diversion Rate (85%+)**
   The program consistently diverts over 85% of construction and renovation waste from landfill, significantly reducing the college's environmental footprint and contributing to its Net Zero and sustainability goals.

2. **Material Recovery and Circular Use**
   Separated materials such as wood, metal, drywall, and concrete are sent to specialized facilities for reuse, recycling, or reprocessing. This promotes a circular economy by keeping valuable resources in use and reducing the demand for virgin materials.

3. **Institutional Leadership and Replicability**
   The program has become a model within the postsecondary sector, demonstrating how standardized procedures, contractor accountability, and clear tracking can lead to successful, scalable waste management solutions aligned with UN SDG 12. It positions Georgian as a sustainability leader and inspires adoption at other institutions.

What barriers or challenges did you encounter in embedding sustainability into your learning and teaching practice and how did you overcome them?

1. **Communication:** One challenge was simply making sure other departments and project leads were aware of the new standards. We addressed this by including clear language in our tender documents, having regular conversations during project planning, and incorporating expectations into our FM standards.

2. **Cost Perception:** There was initial concern that waste diversion might be more expensive than previous landfill services. Costs were actually competitive and the service level was more conducive to space and project needs.

3. **Verification:** it was questioned if materials were truly being diverted. To solve this, our team went to the transfer site to see the sorting process firsthand. We observed how materials from our bins were separated, weighed, and directed to the appropriate recycling or recovery facilities. This site-visit built confidence in the process, strengthened our relationship with the hauler, and confirmed that the diversion data we receive is accurate and reliable.

What are your conclusions and recommendations for others?

Georgian College's construction waste diversion program demonstrates that with clear expectations and standardized procedures, high diversion rates and meaningful sustainability outcomes are achievable. By embedding waste management into project planning, engaging contractors early, and tracking results consistently, the college has created a replicable model that aligns with circular economy principles and UN SDG 12. This program proves that construction can be both innovative and responsible.

If you are looking to establish your own construction waste diversion program, start by integrating diversion goals into procurement documents and construction standards, and work closely with facilities, project managers, and haulers to define material streams and reporting processes. Let your contractors and haulers know that this is how you do business at your institution.