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## Iowa does it better: Necessary role model needed to up Nebraska's poor recycling diversion rates

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Iowa does it better: Necessary role model needed to up Nebraska's poor recycling diversion rates

Course: ENSC 230

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You would be hard-pressed to find a Lincolnite who doesn't believe that recycling has a multitude of benefits. According to Public Works Director Miki Esposito, a recent survey showed that 85 percent of Lincoln residents wanted curbside recycling.

Yet when the time comes to discard recyclables, many of us find excuses to avoid the act. As arguably one of the easiest things to positively impact our city, it is embarrassing that we so often fail to do so.

We could choose to differentiate between recyclable goods and legitimate trash; instead aluminum cans and plastic bottles are lucky to be given a second thought before we send them to their final resting place that is the giant pile of our collective "garbage".

The benefits of recycling are numerous. Recycling saves energy through the conservation of resources, creates new jobs, and prevents the emission of additional greenhouse gases that would have been necessary to produce new products. Additionally, recycling will help prolong the life of our landfill. The location for Lancaster County's second landfill is still up in the air, but making that decision is both costly and controversial.

To date, the national average recycling rate has increased steadily over the years and is now estimated to be 34%.

Recognizing the importance of recycling, some communities have imposed mandates that require citizens to recycle. Others have incentivized the recycling of bottles and cans by providing subsidies. There are places where both practices have been implemented successfully.

Mandates in San Francisco have achieved an 80% recycling diversion rate that has put every other American recycling program to shame. As the first city to require separation of recyclables and compostables by commercial and residential areas alike, San Francisco is on track to meet their goal of zero waste by 2020. An important factor attributed to San Francisco's success is their partnership with Recology to accept a wider range of materials compared to other cities. Using a simple system of color-coded bins, their system allows for easy distinction between placement of waste items such as recyclables, food scraps, or garbage.

Iowa's "Bottle Bill" puts a five-cent deposit on all carbonated and alcoholic beverages that can be recouped by consumers when returned to nearby redemption centers. Enacted in

1978, the bill has boosted the number of containers redeemed to 86%, much higher than the national average of 26%. This bill has enabled the Des Moines metro area to implement a program for bi-weekly curbside, single stream recycling that allows residents to place all recyclable goods in one container.

Lancaster county currently has 34 recycling drop off sites and a recycling diversion rate of 18.4%, which is unfortunately quite a bit better than the state average diversion rate of 11.4%. As Nebraska revamps its football coaching staff, it needs to step up its game on the recycling field as well. Lincoln's poor diversion rates are not due to a lack of locations for proper disposal but rather the mindset we have that personal convenience comes first. Citizens do not see an adequate reward for their time spend sorting and transporting materials to designated sites, but we can change that.

While a policy similar to San Francisco's may not be right for Lincoln, I believe Lincoln should look into a bill similar to Iowa's Beverage Container Control Act. The value of making each empty can is more than the \$0.05 that consumers would receive. With a "Bottle Bill" Nebraska could be on its way to a self-financing system. The value of recovering materials such as aluminum and glass more than offset the expenses of recycling. In addition, implementing the collection of the valuable portion of our waste-stream gets the community to take another look at what they are sending to the landfill.

36 years ago, a Nebraska bill was shot down in part to successful industry advertising using the slogan, "The Bottle Bill; Right Problem but Wrong Solution". Well we were duped. Iowa's "Bottle Bill" has proven to be successful in putting the responsibility on the consumers and producers who litter the most. Iowa's recycling system is an ideal role model for Nebraska in order to promote litter reduction and help the environment.

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