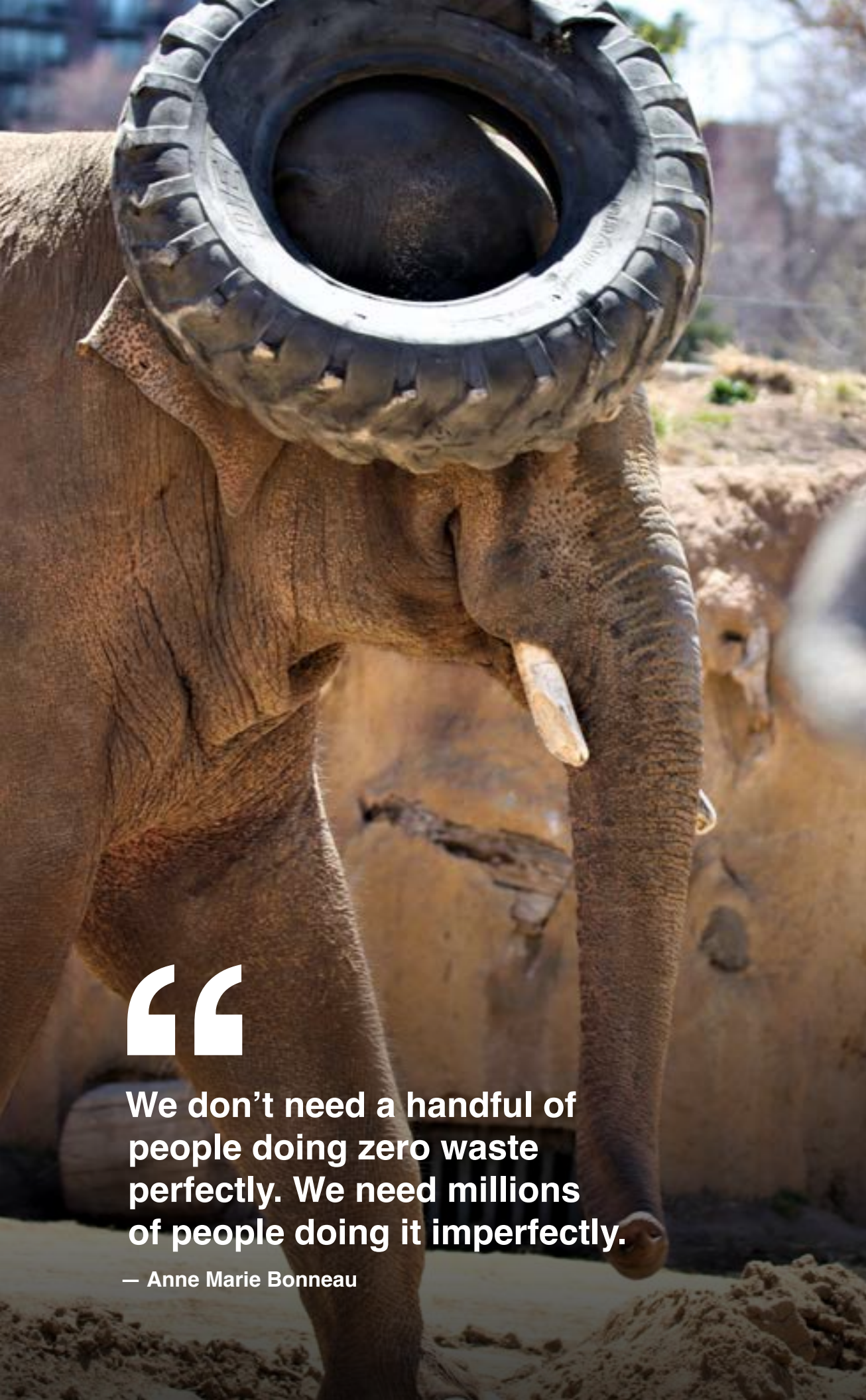


# Universal Labeling Standards for Waste Signage





## Participating Organizations

DENVER  
**art**  
MUSEUM

DENVER BOTANIC  
**GARDENS**

DENVER MUSEUM OF  
**NATURE & SCIENCE**

 **DENVER ZOO**  
CONSERVATION ALLIANCE



We don't need a handful of people doing zero waste perfectly. We need millions of people doing it imperfectly.

— Anne Marie Bonneau



**A pound of contamination  
ruins a ton of compost.**

## Goals

Currently, no consistent waste labeling standards exist, resulting in a confusing array of words, symbols, and colors. This attempt to communicate the same waste disposal instructions across different locations leads to user confusion and significant contamination in waste streams. To address this problem, community members collaborated to create a simple, user-friendly, and flexible standard that can be implemented by any organization.

### The project goals are:

- Standardize waste signage where no standards currently exist
- Reduce waste stream contamination rates caused by inconsistent labeling
- Implement a user-friendly design to improve comprehension for all users
- Integrate flexibility to ensure adaptability Inspire community collaboration for sustainable waste practices



## Writing Team

Blair Neelands  
*Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance*

Cassie Williams  
*Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance*

Julie Arias and Juan Arias  
*Spanish Translation*

## Design Consultants

Ligature Creative, [hello@ligcreative.com](mailto:hello@ligcreative.com)

## Contributors

Blair Neelands, DZCA  
Cassie Williams, DZCA  
Stephanie Bramwell, DZCA  
Katie Zarachowicz, Denver Arts & Venues  
Suzanne Yoe, DCPA  
James Smith, DMNS  
Josh Dahlenburg, DMNS  
Abby Beck, DBG  
Annet Willigenburg, DBG

Noreen Gima, DBG  
Lori Rowe, DBG  
Cisco Ocampo, Children's Museum  
Mark Baker, DAM  
Felicia Alvarez, DAM  
Meagan Holdeman, DCPA  
Alexa Rosenstein, DEN  
Clark Johnson, Arvada Center  
Kelsie DeFrancia, City & County of Denver

DZCA: Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance  
DCPA: Denver Center Performing Arts  
DMNS: Denver Museum of Nature & Science  
DBG: Denver Botanic Gardens  
DAM: Denver Art Museum  
DEN: Denver International Airport

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# **Trash Standards**

**Elements listed in this section represent  
the intended universal labeling elements.**

# Trash Standards

## 1 Label or Text Description



### Label Options

- Include Spanish word option, or any secondary or tertiary language option
- Include a visual division between English and secondary language
- Make labels consistent with the visual bilingual approach already in place
- “Trash” and “Basura”

## 2 Symbol or Pictogram



### Symbol Direction

- Solid with dimension / solid / linear
- Keep consistent pictogram style, if your facility selects a linear symbol (right symbol), use linear style for Recycling and Compost symbols

## 3 Color: Black and Dark Grays



### Color Direction

- Pantone Black
- CMYK, Rich Black — C=30 | M=30 | Y=30 | K=100
- Contrast Ratio — 21 : 1  
Meets WCAG Level AAA for normal and large text.

To meet minimum execution use **LABEL** or **SYMBOL**. Color is never required.

[Download Trash Symbols](#) ↓

Download vector PDF, JPG, or PNG. Available in black and white.

# Best Practices

Design treatments should be the same for all typologies of receptacles throughout your facility. *Best practices are suggestions and considerations to help produce optimal results and are not requirements.*

## Label / Text Description

- Placement: Text placed directly below symbol or pictogram.
- Case: Characters can be Title Case or UPPERCASE.
- Style: Recommend sans-serif, not be italic, oblique, script, highly decorative, or of other unusual forms.
- Text Size: 0.625" to 2" tall.
- Tactile Characters (Braille): Not required.

## Symbol / Pictogram

- Recommended size: 4" symbol/pictogram with clear margin area of 1"
- Clear zone: 6" total area for symbol/pictogram with no other markings

## Color

- High Contrast: High contrast with either light symbol / text on a dark background or dark symbol / text on a light background.
- While not equivalent for print, you may try [WebAIM's Contrast Checker](#) for web accessibility for guidance on your brand's color contrast level.

## Finish

- Design shall have a non-glare finish.



Example Label / Text Description size.



# Not Recommended

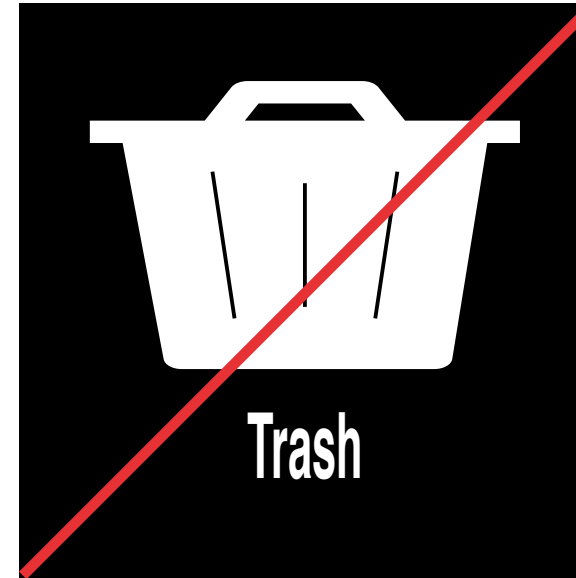
These approaches are not recommended to achieve optimal results.



**DO NOT** use italic, oblique, script, highly decorative, or other unusual fonts.



**DO NOT** add stylistic effects, like drop shadows or include too many colors that may affect the contrast.



**DO NOT** distort symbols or text.



**DO NOT** place on busy and low contrast backgrounds.



**DO NOT** rotate elements. Make text follow simple left-to-right reading conventions.



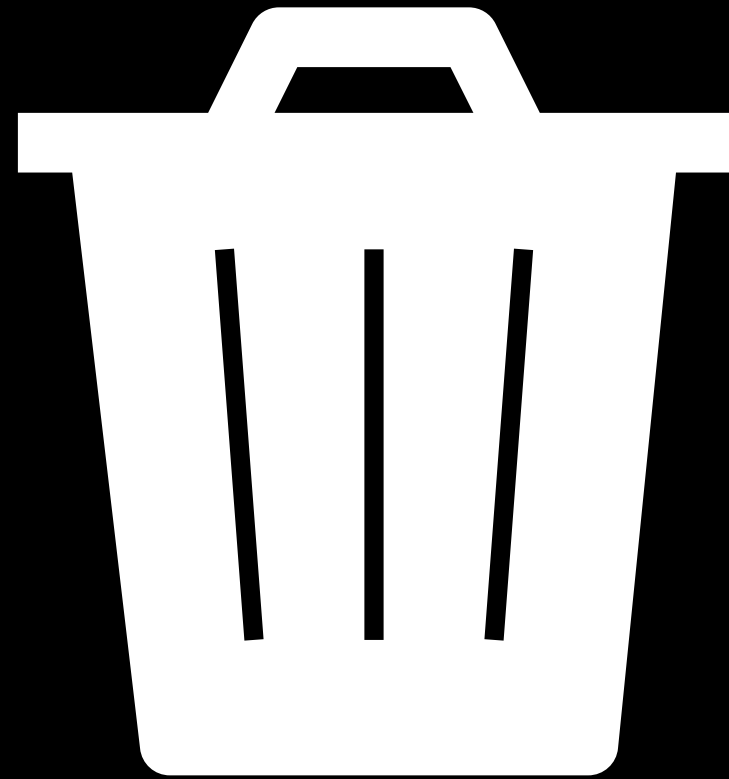
**DO NOT** use mixed messaging, such as a bulldozer symbol or blue Recycling color or green Compost color.



**DO NOT** use confusing symbols that may appear as Recycling, such as leaves in the formation of a recycling symbol.



**DO NOT** crop, rearrange overlap or obscure signage elements.



**Trash**

**Basura**

1"  
margin

4"  
symbol

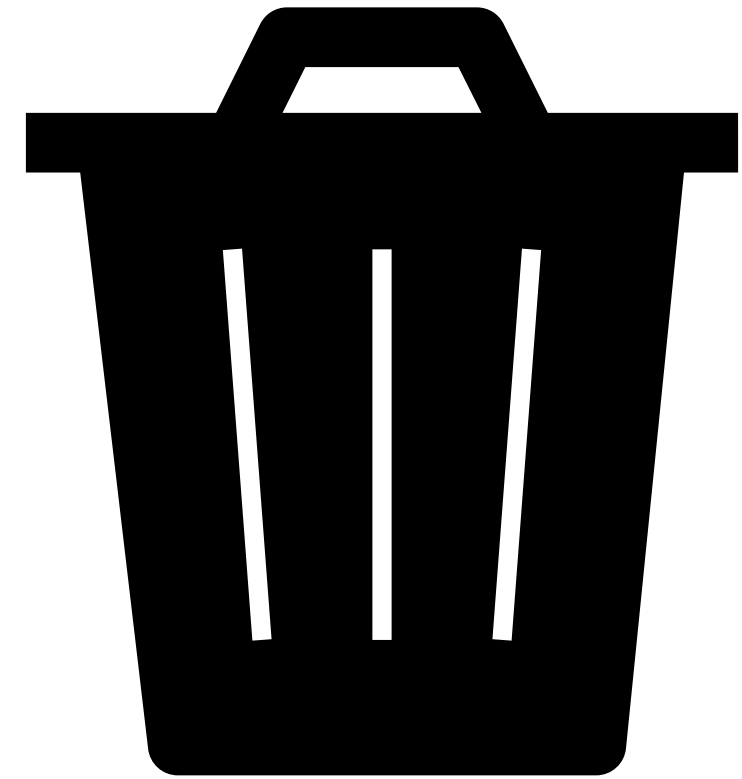
1"  
margin

0.625" text

1"  
margin

0.625" text

1"  
margin



**Trash**

**Basura**

## Downloads

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Download vector PDF, JPG, or PNG.  
Available in black and white.

[Download Readymade Signs](#) ↓

Available in vector PDF, JPG, or PNG.

- English Only with symbol
- English & Spanish with symbol
- English & “Blank Space” for a tertiary language with symbol



# Recycling Standards

**Elements listed in this section represent the intended universal labeling elements.**

# Recycling Standards

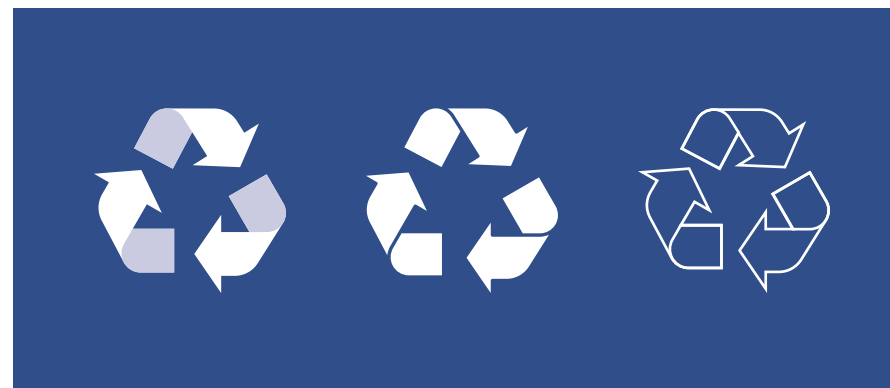
## 1 Label or Text Description



### Label Options

- Include Spanish word option, or any secondary or tertiary language option
- Include a visual division between English and secondary language
- Make labels consistent with the visual bilingual approach already in place
- “**Recycling**” and “**Reciclaje**”

## 2 Symbol or Pictogram



### Symbol Direction

- Solid with dimension / solid / linear
- Keep consistent symbol style, if your facility selects a solid symbol, use solid style for Trash and Compost symbols
- The recycling symbol has had international recognition since the 1970s. We do not recommend straying from the universal symbol

## 3 Color: Blue and Variations



### Color Direction

- **Pantone 293**
- **CMYK C=100 | M=76 | Y=0 | K=9**
- **Contrast Ratio — 8.14 : 1**  
Meets WCAG Level AAA for normal and large text.

To meet minimum execution use **LABEL** or **SYMBOL**. Color is never required.

[Download Recycling Symbols](#) ↓

Download vector PDF, JPG, or PNG. Available in blue and white.

# Best Practices

Design treatments should be the same for all typologies of receptacles throughout your facility. *Best practices are suggestions and considerations to help produce optimal results and are not requirements.*

## Label / Text Description

- Placement: Text placed directly below symbol or pictogram.
- Case: Characters can be Title Case or UPPERCASE.
- Style: Recommend sans-serif, not be italic, oblique, script, highly decorative, or of other unusual forms.
- Text Size: 0.625" to 2" tall.
- Tactile Characters (Braille): Not required.

## Symbol / Pictogram

- Recommended size: 4" symbol/pictogram with clear margin area of 1"
- Clear zone: 6" total area for symbol/pictogram with no other markings

## Color

- High Contrast: High contrast with either light symbol / text on a dark background or dark symbol / text on a light background.
- While, not equivalent for print, you may try [WebAIM's Contrast Checker](#) for web accessibility for guidance on your brand's color contrast level.

## Finish

- Design shall have a non-glare finish.

0.625" is roughly 65 point Helvetica Bold.  
*Size may differ in your brand font.*

0.625"

2" is roughly 204 point Helvetica Bold.  
*Size may differ in your brand font.*

2"

Example Label / Text Description size.

## Not Recommended

These approaches are not recommended to achieve optimal results.



**DO NOT** use italic, oblique, script, highly decorative, or other unusual fonts.



**DO NOT** add stylistic effects, like drop shadows or include too many colors that may effect the contrast.



**DO NOT** distort symbols or text.



**DO NOT** place on busy and low contrast backgrounds.



**DO NOT** rotate elements. Make text follow simple left-to-right reading conventions.



**DO NOT** use mixed messaging: a trash symbol with "Recycling" text and a city or vendor's brand color.



**DO NOT** use confusing symbols that may appear as Compost, such as leaves in the formation of the a recycling symbol.



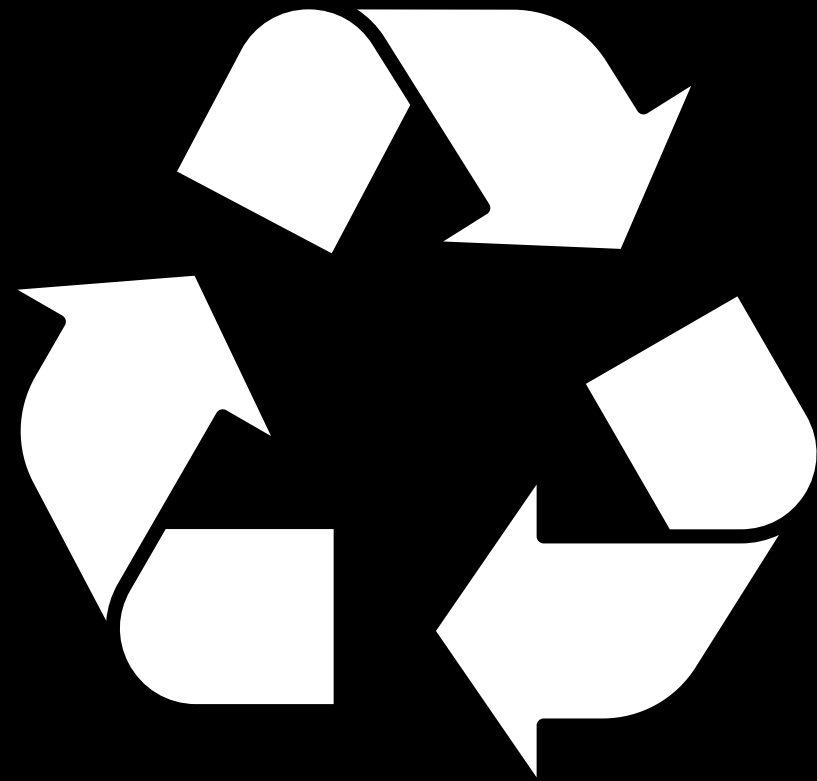
**DO NOT** crop, rearrange or obscure signage elements.



1" margin
4" symbol
1" margin
0.625" text
1" margin
0.625" text
1" margin







**Recycling**

---

**Reciclaje**

1"  
margin

4"  
symbol

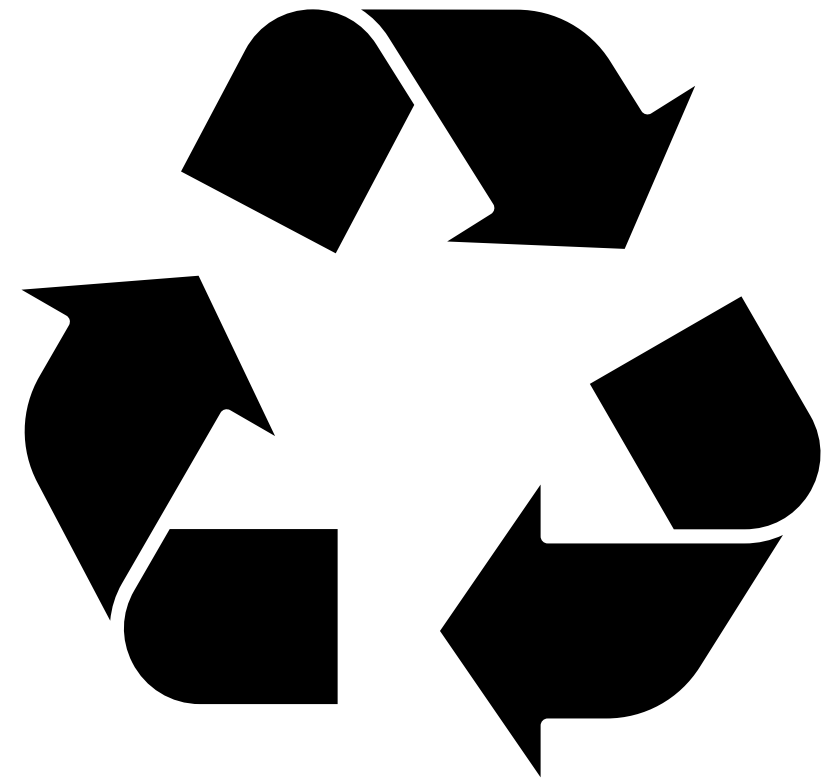
1"  
margin

0.625" text

1"  
margin

0.625" text

1"  
margin



**Recycling**

---

**Reciclaje**

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[Download Readymade Sign](#) ↓

Available in vector PDF, JPG, or PNG.

- English Only with symbol
- English & Spanish with symbol
- English & “Blank Space” for a tertiary language with symbol



# Compost Standards

**Elements listed in this section represent the intended universal labeling elements.**

# Compost Standards

## 1 Label or Text Description



### Label Options

- Include Spanish word option, or any secondary or tertiary language option
- Include a visual division between English and secondary language
- Make labels consistent with the visual bilingual approach already in place
- “**Compost**” and “**Desperdicio Organico**”

## 2 Symbol or Pictogram



### Symbol Direction

- **Food Waste Only:** partially eaten food symbols, apple core, pizza, banana peel
- Keep consistent pictogram style, if your facility selects a solid pictogram, use a solid style for Trash and Recycling pictograms

## 3 Color: Green and Variations



### Color Direction

- **Pantone 355**
- **CMYK — C=93 | M=0 | Y=100 | K=0**
- **Contrast Ratio — 3.79 : 1**  
Meets WCAG Level AA for large text only. Large text is defined as 14 pt. bold; or 18 pt. normal.

To meet minimum execution use **LABEL** or **SYMBOL**. Color is never required.

[Download Compost Symbols ↓](#)

Download vector PDF, JPG, or PNG. Available in green and white.

# Best Practices

Design treatments should be the same for all typologies of receptacles throughout your facility. *Best practices are suggestions and considerations to help produce optimal results and are not requirements.*

## Label / Text Description

- Placement: Text placed directly below symbol or pictogram.
- Case: Characters can be Title Case or UPPERCASE.
- Style: Recommend sans-serif, not be italic, oblique, script, highly decorative, or of other unusual forms.
- Text Size: 0.625" to 2" tall.
- Tactile Characters (Braille): Not required.

## Symbol / Pictogram

- Recommended size: 4" symbol/pictogram with clear margin area of 1"
- Clear zone: 6" total area for symbol/pictogram with no other markings

## Color

- High Contrast: High contrast with either light symbol / text on a dark background or dark symbol / text on a light background.
- While, not equivalent for print, you may try [WebAIM's Contrast Checker](#) for web accessibility for guidance on your brand's color contrast level.

## Finish

- Design shall have a non-glare finish.

0.625" is roughly 65 point Helvetica Bold.  
*Size may differ in your brand font.*

0.625"

2" is roughly 204 point Helvetica Bold.  
*Size may differ in your brand font.*

2"

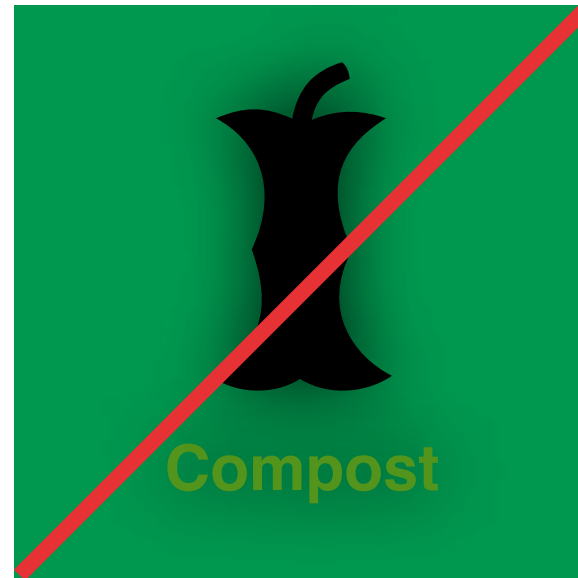
Example Label / Text Description size.

## Not Recommended

These approaches are not recommended to achieve optimal results.



**DO NOT** use italic, oblique, script, highly decorative, or other unusual fonts.



**DO NOT** add stylistic effects, like drop shadows or include too many colors that may effect the contrast.



**DO NOT** distort symbols or text.



**DO NOT** place symbols or labels on busy and low contrast backgrounds.



**DO NOT** rotate elements. Make text follow simple left-to-right reading conventions.



**DO NOT** use mixed messaging, such as a trash symbol with "Compost" text or blue Recycling color.



**DO NOT** use unfamiliar or confusing symbols, such as leaves in the formation of Recycling arrows.



**DO NOT** crop, rearrange overlap or obscure signage elements.



**Compost**

---

**Desperdicio  
Organico**

visual 1"  
margin

4"  
symbol

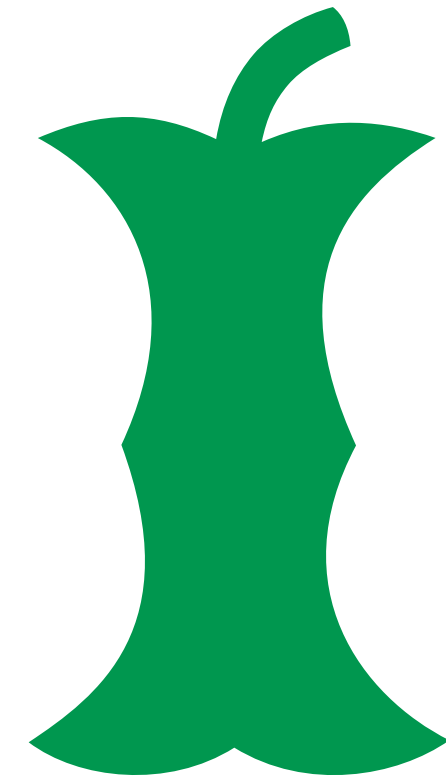
1"  
margin

0.625" text

1"  
margin

0.625" text

1"  
margin



**Compost**

---

**Desperdicio  
Organico**



visual 1" margin
4" symbol
1" margin
0.625" text
1" margin
0.625" text
1" margin





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- English Only with symbol
- English & Spanish with symbol
- English & “Blank Space” for a tertiary language with symbol

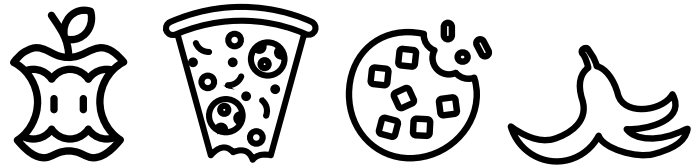


# **Style Variations**

**Details in this section represent additional resources and options to enhance labeling and are not intended as standards.**

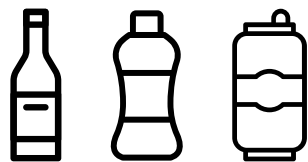
# Optional Symbols / Pictograms

Consider additional symbols or pictograms\* for frequently missorted trash items.



## Compost Symbols

Partially consumed food items or compostable products brand logos



## Recycling Symbols

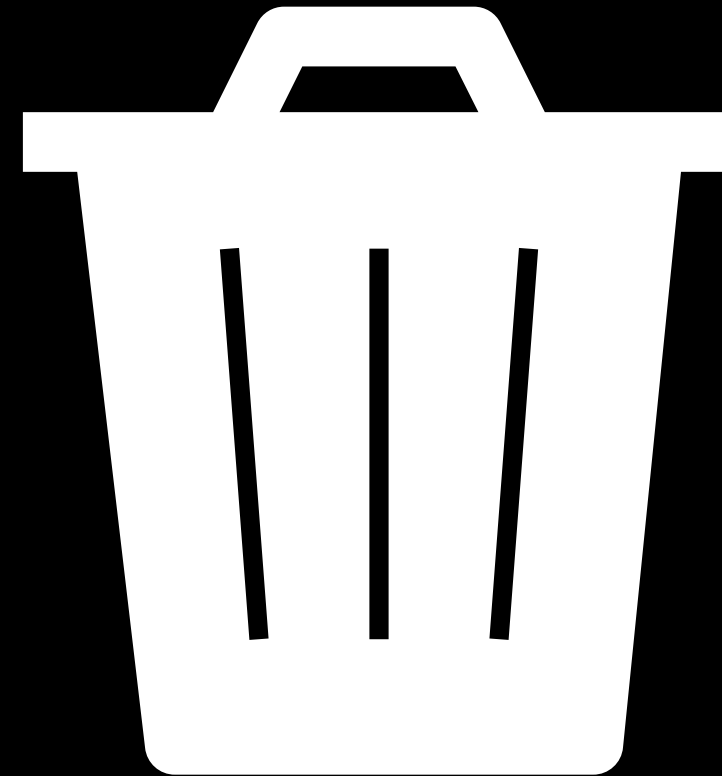
Glass, plastic, cans



## Trash Symbols

Common trash items, mistakenly sorted

*\*These symbols are examples and can be adjusted as needed.*



# Trash

# Basura



# Optional Photographic Cues

Consider a physical item display.\*



## Compost Symbols

Compostable packaging materials, photo of food scraps, etc.



## Recycling Symbols

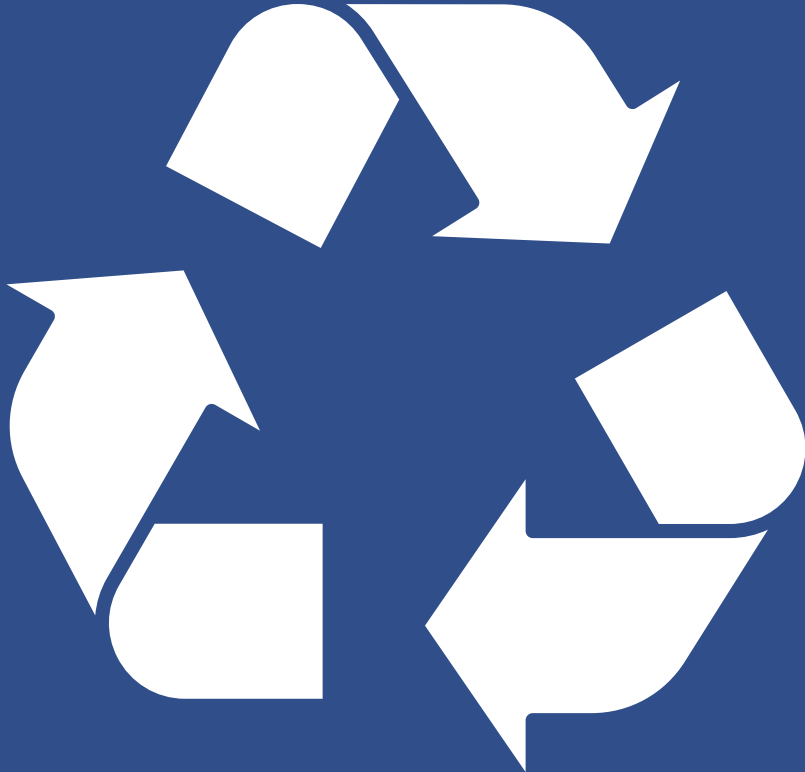
Glass, plastic, cans, brand name containers you sell



## Trash Symbols

Common trash items that are greenwashed and wrongly sorted

*\*These photos are examples and can be adjusted as needed.*



# Recycling

---

# Reciclaje



## Optional Text Cues

A text listing clarifying specific items can make it easier for patrons to sort their waste. Limit to 1–3 lines of text.

### Compost

“Food Scraps Only”

“Used Paper Napkins”

“BPI-certified”

### Recycling

“Glass and Plastic Bottles”

“Glass Bottles”

“Plastic Bottles”

“Aluminum Cans”

### Trash

“Diapers”

“Fruit Pouches”

“Snack / Chip Bags”



**Compost**  
Food Scraps Only

---

**Desperdicio  
Organico**  
Solo Desechos de Comida

# Material Variations



**Plastic**



**Metal**



**Wood**

# References

# State of Colorado Compostable Product Labeling Act

As of July 1, 2024, Colorado Senate Bill 23-253 requires food service products and plastic products labeled as compostable sold or distributed in Colorado to be certified compostable and to be clearly marked.

## Requirements for certified compostable products

- It is compostable by **ASTM D6400** or **ASTMD6868** standards.
- The product must be immediately distinguishable as certified compostable upon quick inspection.



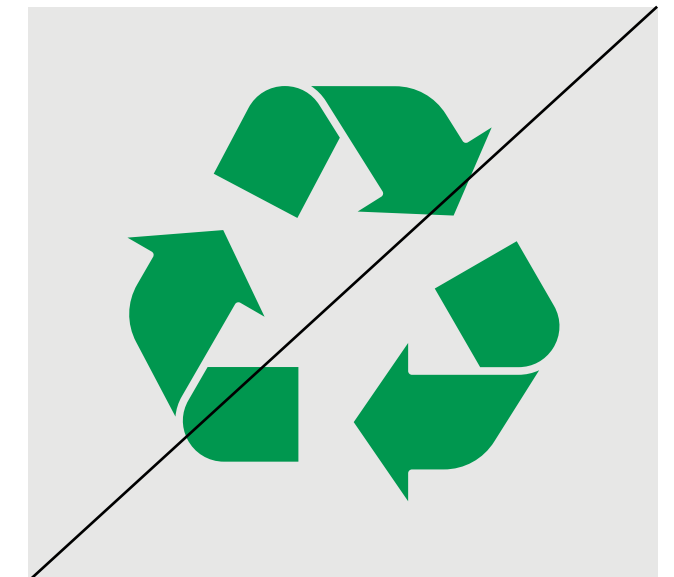
A certification logo that indicates certified compostable, like BPI's.



The word "compostable" where possible.



Green symbols, colors, tinting, marks or design patterns.



It must not display a chasing arrow resin identification code or recycling symbol.

Learn more at [cdphe.colorado.gov](https://cdphe.colorado.gov)



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**“Waste is a design flaw.”**

— Kate Krebs