

Trash talk: Somerville cafe owners explore new ways of reducing waste

By Tania Mejer
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Two Somerville cafes have taken trash to the next level.

Jennifer Park and Tucker Lewis, co-owners of both Bloc 11 and Diesel Cafe, have ditched trash cans. Now their customers have to put everything into bus bins. When employees collect the bins, they sort recycling and separate food and paper waste for composting.

Park said it might seem harder than throwing everything into one trash bin. "But after a while, it just becomes part of the system, and we can't really remember how it was any other way," she said.

"The amazing thing about our waste program is that once we started paying attention to our waste, we started being more efficient about ways to eliminate or reduce waste, and we have actually started to save money at both stores."

The trash cans disappeared first from Bloc 11, where staff composted since the cafe opened. Before, not all customers knew to leave food and napkins in the bus bins, and



Molly McCadden helps a customer at Bloc 11, another recycling hot spot in Somerville. Photo by Ted Fitzgerald

10 bags per day to just two. This trash comes mainly from items customers bring into the cafes, according to Park. It also includes waste from the bathrooms (which can't safely be composted), as well as a few noncompostable items the cafes use, such as plastic cling film and rubber gloves. But all the take-away items - napkins, straws, stirrers, cups, even flatware - are compostable, as are the bags each cafe uses for its lone trash can.

The cafes' waste management plan is made possible in part by Save That Stuff, which collects compostables and recycling from hundreds of businesses. Annually, Save That Stuff collects 4,600 tons of organic waste, which it takes to farm-based sites for processing.

Save That Stuff partner [Adam Mitchell](#) lauds the efforts of Park and Lewis.

"They've really shown how close you can get to zero waste," he said. "The exciting thing is we've been able to demonstrate that no matter the space constraints, you can organize space to make room for recyclables and composting."

Bloc 11: 11 Bow St., Somerville; 617-623-0000; bloc11.com. Diesel Cafe: 257 Elm St., Somerville; 617-629-8717; diesel-cafe.com. Save That Stuff:



Bones Buchanan of Diesel Cafe in Somerville uses a strainer to help with the environmentally friendly processing of the cafe's waste. Photo by Ted Fitzgerald

staffer Cole Johanneck said some people tossed recyclables in the trash. Now, nothing goes to waste.

With strong customer support and proof the staff could make it work at Bloc 11, Park and Lewis took out the trash at Diesel.

The changes are noticeable. Diesel manager Jess Brasil said that on a recent waste pickup day, the cafe put out all of its eight trash-can-sized bins of compost, plus one recycling bin full of compost, along with containers and paper recycling (the cafe has two other large recycling bins for containers, and six curbside-size containers for paper). But the lone remaining trash can wasn't even full. Park estimates Diesel reduced its trash from



Bin there, done it: Bloc 11 in Union Square is a leader in the recycling effort. Meg Mrideau shows where the barrels are kept, each one labeled. Photo by Ted Fitzgerald