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R-Store long has recycled

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The sheer volume of beverages available at most gas stations is staggering.

There's the regular selections of soda and juice along- side sports drinks, energy drinks and scores of beer brands.

When customers are done whetting their whistles, there also are mountains of plastic bottles and aluminum cans to discard. More stores have added recycling bins as a way to entice customers to reduce waste rather than throwing the empties into a landfill.

The 26 R-Stores in central Wisconsin have recycling bins by their trash cans. Mark Lubinski, the retail area manger for R-Stores, said being at the forefront was part of the company's plan.

"We wanted to offer people the option to recycle," he said. "We've had the bins at our store on Highway 10 for years, and we've noticed people definitely take the time to use the bins. It does cost a little extra, but it's the trend nowadays. People are paying more attention to the environment, and we all have to do our part."

Kathy Powell, the education and program specialist for the Recycling Connections Corp. in Portage County, said all businesses are required by law to recycle.

"It's not just the right thing to do, it's the law," she said. "The plastic bottles don't break down in landfills, and they just pile up."

Plastic and aluminum aren't the only recyclable materials at gas stations. Cardboard boxes from deliveries are recycled, and the station's car washes use self-contained water, Lubinski said. The R-Stores started installing light-emitting diode, or LED, bulbs, which use less energy and last longer than fluorescent.

"In April we donated 500 oak trees to the Boston School Forest, and for Earth Day we gave away a free tree with every car wash," Lubinski said.

The R-Store was named a Remarkable Recycler of the Month last year by Portage County.

Lubinski said the store created a panel to identify ways the company can do more to benefit the environment and ways that customers can pitch in.

"Back when we first started, we ended up getting more trash in the recycling bins and vice versa, but it's caught on," Lubinski said. "It's a little thing, but it's good that we as a company can do our part to help out."