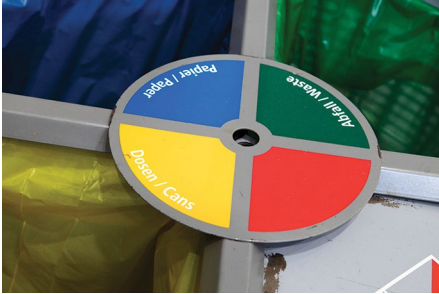


ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Confusing disposal information

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Credit: Holger Burmeister / Alamy Stock Photo

Information displays to aid waste separation are relatively inexpensive, but designing them effectively is crucial. Little is known about how different forms of displaying information can enhance attention and guide individuals to deposit their rubbish in the right place.

David Wu at the University of British Columbia, Canada, and colleagues ran three behavioural experiments in the lab in order to test participants' sorting effectiveness — how well they could match an item to the appropriate bin. They used motion-tracking technology and a large touchscreen to measure the speed and accuracy of participants sorting items into bins. They found that using colour pictures and, to a lesser extent, black and white pictures or icons, instead of text alone, in addition to positioning the signs consistently across bins, improve sorting performance. In particular, positioning icons consistently can increase sorting accuracy by about 10%. In contrast, showing both allowed and prohibited items in the same signage can lead to confusion, error or slower understanding.

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