

Plan a Recycling Program at Work

You've gathered great information on recycling, put it into practice at home, and shared it with your family friends. Now it's time to take it to the next level—starting a Recycling Program at work! This overview will help you plan out the important steps to successfully implement a program at your workplace. Let's get started.

- A. GATHER INFORMATION**
- B. DESIGN THE PROGRAM**
- C. EDUCATE YOUR WORKPLACE**
- D. SUSTAIN THE PROGRAM**
- E. GET TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

A. GATHER INFORMATION

Account for Management and Coworker Support

The first step can be the most difficult hurdle to get over: getting management on board. As daunting as it may seem, convincing management to buy into the program is the key to success. While talking about the environmental benefits is a good place to start, the best approach to getting management buy-in is looking at the issue from the standpoint of the company's bottom line. Most successful businesses practice maximizing income while minimizing costs. You can show your company that implementing reducing, reusing and recycling practices can avoid much of the high costs of waste disposal *and* lower net operating costs.

Most businesses use materials that are easily recyclable, such as paper, plastic, packaging, glass, metal and wood. Some of these commodities—like office paper and metal—are valuable recyclables and could add a new source of income for your company. Simply establishing that fact may be enough to get you the green light to plan the program for a presentation to your management team and, later, to your coworkers.

While management support is critical to the success of your program, it is also important to help all employees understand the benefits. Assuming you will get management support, include the following in your plan:

- How you will implement company-wide recycling policies, including education of all personnel
- Allocation of resources (personnel and money)
- Assistance with ongoing employee communication about program successes
- Design for a kickoff event or other company-wide activities for the program

List the Responsibilities of the Coordinator (You)

You should be enthusiastic about recycling and able to communicate well with co-workers, custodial staff and management about the program. The coordinator should be responsible for:

- Conducting a waste assessment
- Evaluating which materials can be reduced or recycled
- Organizing the program
- Procuring equipment
- Negotiating contracts and working with service providers
- Contacting suppliers and staying current with recycled product prices
- Teaching employees how to recycle
- Ensuring that recyclables are ready for pick-up
- Telling everyone in the business about program goals and successes

If your business has several departments, you may want to create a recycling team to work with you, the Coordinator. The team should include representatives of each department or division, which includes but is not limited to maintenance, purchasing, personnel, food service and customer service. Each team member should have an interest in recycling, good communication skills, and the authority to devote work time to the program.

Conduct a Waste Assessment

The process of looking at what your business throws away and the associated costs is a critical step in developing your program. A waste assessment will determine the following: (a) the quantity of waste your business generates;

(b) your current disposal costs; (c) what your business throws away that could potentially be recycled; and (d) the cost/benefit of your recycling program. Develop a Waste Assessment Form to track these.

1. How much waste does your business produce?

In order to determine how much waste your workplace generates, you will need to know the number of garbage containers and their volume. List the types of collection containers you use or are available from your hauler and add it to your Waste Assessment Form.

2. How much does your waste disposal cost?

Disposal costs are either charged as a flat fee, are included in rent, or are based on the volume and weight of waste your workplace generates. To get an overview of the specific costs associated with your current service, determine how your disposal costs are charged. If your company is in a multi-tenant building, disposal costs may be included in your lease or charged as a flat fee. You may need to get this information from your hauler, building manager, property management company or custodial staff. Once you have determined how the business is charged for waste disposal, add this information to your Waste Assessment Form.

3. What is in your garbage?

Once you know the amount of waste your company throws away and how much it costs, you will need to add the types of materials and the percentage of waste each material comprises to your Waste Assessment Form. Walking through your entire workplace will help you identify materials that can be reduced, reused or recycled. Plan to walk through on several different days and estimate the percentage of each type of material in the garbage (e.g. 60% mixed paper, 15% white paper, 10% plastic bottles, 10% food waste, 5% computer equipment). Visit each part of your company where waste is generated and where materials are stored.

4. What are your potential annual costs or savings?

Now that you know which materials are thrown away, the relative volume of those materials, and how much it costs to dispose of them, you need to decide what percent could be reduced, reused, recycled, or purchased with recycled content materials. This information will help you assess the costs and benefits of reducing, reusing and recycling at your company. You may want to divide the results into categories based on the materials that make up the largest part of your waste and the materials that generate the most income in order to address management's priorities. Be sure to include start-up costs and projections for cost-savings and add these to the Waste Assessment Form.

B. DESIGN THE PROGRAM

Now it's time to take your Waste Assessment Form and use it to design a program that works for your company. A successful program tends to follow four key steps:

1. Prioritize Waste Reduction

Start by looking for ways to reduce waste in the following areas.

Purchasing: Are you overloaded with disposable merchandise? Try purchasing durable or reusable merchandise that is made from recycled materials instead of costly disposables.

Manufacturing: What happens to trimmings or unavoidable overruns from your manufacturing processes? You can make it a priority to return these materials to the production process whenever possible.

Packaging: Try to use just the amount of packaging you need- don't over package items. Recycle or reuse boxes, packaging peanuts and bags.

Distributors/Suppliers: Can your distributor deliver products in less packaging or take back old packaging for reuse? Do they offer products that are made from recycled materials?

Food Service: Use refillable containers for condiments instead of individual packets. Serve beverages from dispensers rather than individual bottles or containers. Purchase washable and reusable aprons, gloves, linens and rags.

2. Identify Materials to Collect

Start with materials that make up the largest portion of the waste stream or with the most commonly recycled items (e.g. paper products, glass bottles, plastic bottles, aluminum and steel cans). Determine if the material can be eliminated or reduced through a change in operations or reused by your company or someone else. Collect a few recyclable materials at first and, then, as customers and employees make recycling a habit, new materials can be phased in. For businesses with large quantities of recyclable materials, consider establishing a pilot program to work out any kinks before expanding the program company-wide.

3. Begin Collection

Determine how the recyclable materials will be handled. Can you utilize your local waste hauler, will you hire a private hauler to collect the materials, or will you self-haul them to a recycling drop-off that accepts materials from businesses? If you are in a multi-tenant building, contact neighboring businesses to find out:

- if they are already recycling
- who their recycling hauler is
- what suggestions they may have based on their experiences
- if you can consolidate your efforts and reduce collection costs

If you decide to have your materials hauled (as opposed to self-haul) you will need to choose a recycling hauler (your local waste hauler usually offers this service). Some outside haulers offer different services and collect a variety of recyclable materials. Decide which materials your company will recycle and check with several haulers about their services and business practices. The information they provide will become part of your plan.

Collection Containers

Consider the following when deciding what type of collection container to use at your business:

Style – Many different styles of bins exist to fit different types of materials or different size collection or storage spaces. Your service provider may provide containers as part of your contract. If not, several varieties can be purchased at office supply and hardware stores.

Placement – Plan to place containers in areas where recyclables are generated – near copiers, printers, fax machines, soda machines, desks, garages, bars, housekeeper carts, etc.

Signage – Placing proper signage on and/or above all of the recycling containers will reduce contamination.

Storage Space

A proclaimed deterrent to recycling at work is the lack of space to collect and store recyclables. If space is limited at your business plan to:

Use stackable containers or utilize your vertical space with shelving

Place individual containers under desks

Place collection containers under tables, in cabinets, or outside.

4. Determine Costs

Possible costs associated with starting a recycling program include:

Purchase or rental of recycling containers

Ongoing collection charges by recycling haulers

Costs of transporting materials to a local drop-off center if not contracting with a hauling company

Processing fees

Signage and other informational materials

Control potential costs by thoroughly research recycling services. Determine whether purchasing the containers for your business is more cost-effective than having the hauler include them as part of their service. Look for opportunities to combine materials to reduce labor and the number of containers used. Once you have your recycling program in place, you may notice that you are NOT filling up your garbage dumpster as fast. Offset the cost of recycling by reducing your garbage collection frequency or bin size.

C. EDUCATE YOUR WORKPLACE

Employee and/or customer participation is critical to the success of your program. If you want strong participation, you must educate employees and/or customers about the program and make it easy for everyone to participate. Plan to hold training sessions at staff meetings. Be prepared to answer questions, provide encouragement and discuss the benefits of your company's recycling program. Provide literature explaining the benefits of recycling. Your hauler may be able to supply educational materials. Some businesses have hosted a special event or party to kick off its program. To publicize your program consider making special recycling posters, buttons or banners (from recycled materials, of course). Once your program is launched, plan to encourage input and ideas from customers, staff and management.

D. SUSTAIN THE PROGRAM

After you have launched your new recycling program, you will want to ensure its continued success. Company and public recognition will keep customers and/or employees motivated and enthusiastic.

1. Plan to Track Your Success

It's important to monitor and evaluate the program to ensure its viability and success. To demonstrate that the program is cost-effective, plan to track any income generated from the sale of recyclables and any savings in disposal costs. Ask your hauler to provide data on the quantity of materials that will be recycled. Plan to demonstrate how recycled materials purchased by your company have reduced the need for virgin materials or even how the program has saved purchasing or handling costs. Monitor the types and prices of recycled products used by your company to make sure you are getting the best deal. Prices for recycled content products can vary throughout the year.

2. Keep Everyone Informed

Plan to provide regular updates and words of encouragement to customers, employees and management about the program. Employees need to know that their commitment helps achieve the program's goals. Positive communication and employee recognition are critical to the long-term success of the program. If a change is made, promptly post an announcement to let everyone know of changes in the program. Continually emphasize the program's success and remember to reward good behavior. Consider giving awards to employees who have shown creativity and initiative with their strategies for waste reduction and recycling. Encourage each work area to designate a Recycling Team Leader to monitor efforts, train new employees and encourage others to use the program.

3. Get Recognition for Your Efforts

When your business joins the hundreds of other businesses already recycling, you will want to say so! Plan to publicize your efforts by getting the message to employees, management and the public. When you make the commitment to recycle, you're helping to reduce waste and improve the environment. Your customers and community will appreciate that.

E. GET TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (if needed)

Get a copy of the Jackson County SMARTWorks "Setting Up a Recycling Program" handout for more detailed information on setting up your program once you have approval. Contact SMARTWorks at www.jcsmartworks.org. You can also contact your local waste hauler. They are committed to helping your business reduce waste and recycle, and they can help you with information and suggestions to make your plan work. Ask for suggestions about buying products made of recycled materials and for technical assistance on identifying recycling haulers, recommendations on self-waste assessments, and assisting with the design of a collection system.

We hope this information helps you on your journey to a more sustainable workplace. Now, take the knowledge, information and your enthusiasm, and begin making a difference at work!

Sources: Information for this article was from SMARTWorks, Portland Metro Region Master Recycler Program and the EPA.