

How to Develop an Office Recycling/Waste Diversion Program

Step-By-Step Guide

This guide explains the process for establishing a cost-efficient and environmentally responsible recycling program. It is designed to provide the basis for a successful collection program. Collection programs should be tailored to meet the individual needs of a business or agency, but all programs require similar approaches for start-up. This guide was developed with help from the City of Boulder.

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Why should you start an office recycling program?

Recycling reduces disposal costs

Recycling can reduce the amount of waste your company sends to the landfill, thereby reducing the amount you pay to have the waste picked up by your trash hauler.

Recycling conserves resources and the environment

Less energy is needed to manufacture paper from recycled fiber than from virgin wood. Recycling also reduces waste deposited in landfills, thus prolonging the life of our overburdened landfills.

Recycling benefits your business

Today, business' commitment to community responsibility means being a good citizen, both locally and globally. That includes protection of the environment through resource management, taxes and licenses, awareness and education programs, conservation, and recycling.

Collection is not the whole story of recycling

If you're not also buying recycled products you're not really recycling. It isn't enough to have businesses or governments collect recyclables. The materials must have a market to have a value. All collection programs should work simultaneously with a procurement program that establishes a policy to buy products made with recycled materials.

Obtain owner/management support

It is critical to get management support for any program that affects all employees. Be sure to check with your top management or senior company officer to get the go-ahead to start a recycling program. Their support is

crucial to your success. If you lease space in multi-tenant building ask your building management office if a recycling program exists or is being planned.

Appoint a recycling coordinator and obtain buy-in from employees

A successful recycling program needs an enthusiastic individual to serve as a recycling or environmental champion who can get everyone motivated and working together as a team. The coordinator should have a commitment to recycling, organizational experience, good communication skills, a good rapport with the staff, and a thorough understanding of how the program works.

Depending on the size of your office, several coordinators may be needed to keep the program running smoothly. Your recycling service provider can answer questions or help train your recycling coordinator or entire staff. The coordinator will spend anywhere from a day or two to a couple of weeks getting a recycling program off the ground. After the program has started, the coordinator will need no more than a few hours each month to monitor the program.

The coordinator is responsible for selecting a waste dealer, developing the collection system, getting the employees involved, and tracking the progress of the program. Try to involve as many employees as possible in the planning stage. A memo soliciting ideas for recycling from employees helps garner support and interest. Although the job has many responsibilities, almost all coordinators find that the rewards of organizing a recycling program far outweigh the work involved.

Determine what to recycle and how to separate

Conduct a walk-through audit by checking waste containers and assessing the material that your business produces. Typically office environments produce lots of mixed paper, including cardboard, and food and beverage containers. Identify the number of employees in the business that will need an extra container. Find out where the large waste generators are. Examples include in-house copy centers, computer rooms, and kitchens. Determine the volume being generated and frequency of current waste pick-up.

A professional waste audit can help your business not only understand what you are throwing away but also find ways to reduce waste and potentially save money on your monthly trash bills. A typical waste audit will help your business:

- Identify the amount of waste that is discarded at your business (and see where it is generated)
- Understand the actual costs of your trash service
- Learn more about your current hauling services and their options
- Uncover the potential for recycling and waste reduction at your business
- Estimate the avoided disposal costs you could realize through waste diversion and recycling

Many waste haulers, cities, and counties in Colorado offer free or discounted waste audits to help your business increase recycling and reduce your trash bills. Search CAFR's member directory (www.cafr.org/members/directory.php) to find waste audit services. There are also other resources on-line that can help your company learn how to conduct your own waste audit.

Obtain maintenance, custodial and staff input

Involve the custodial staff in planning of your program since they will play a critical role in reducing contamination and transporting your recyclable materials. Many times, the custodial staff may simply help with transferring recyclables from internal containers to the outside or center collection point for the recycling service providers. It's important that custodians be recognized for their contributions to the program. Also,

custodians should not be expected to sort contaminants, only to monitor and report sources of contamination to the program coordinator.

If you do not have custodial staff it is important to be clear that each employee is responsible for taking recyclable materials to a central area where the recycler picks up the material. Choose the system that will work best for your business.

Contact recycling haulers

Often, you can start by contacting your current waste hauler to add recycling or compost service to your account. If you do not have an existing contract with a hauler, call around for cost quotes. Find the hauler that suits your businesses' needs and make sure to ask for guidelines, desk-side containers, signage and container stickers if available.

The following questions will help you select a recycling company:

- What recyclable materials are collected? Do they charge for this service? If so, how much?
- What grades of paper are to be collected and what is the minimum amount required for a pick-up?
- Will the dealer pay you for your paper and beverage containers?
- Will the dealer help you organize and promote your program?
- Is the dealer willing to sign at least a one-year contract?
- What is the allowable level of contamination?
- Will the dealer collect the paper from each floor container in your office, or does the paper need to be consolidated into one main storage area?
- Will the dealer supply recycling containers to use throughout the office: desk containers, floor containers and large bins for the main storage area?
- Will the dealer provide "scheduled" or "on-call" pickups? When checking companies' references, it is helpful to ask how responsible the haulers have been with their pick-ups, i.e. Do trucks usually arrive within 24 hours of a phone call if pick-up is arranged on an on-call basis? If pick-ups are pre-scheduled, has the hauler been arriving on schedule?
- Does the dealer offer destruction services for confidential materials? Do these services meet your legal requirements for destruction?
- What reporting method does the dealer provide for tonnage collected and percentage of contamination?

Order recycling containers

Most businesses find that participation increases when collection begins at an employee's desk. Some recyclers may supply you with desk-side recycling containers.

Schedule and provide educational sessions

Providing employees with an adequate understanding of how your recycling program will work is crucial to its success. All employees should be encouraged to attend. Serving food always helps motivate employees to come!

The education sessions should explain:

- Why the company is starting a recycling program.
- What benefits the company expects to receive from recycling.
- What materials are going to be recycled/composted.
- How the materials are going to be diverted and collected.

- Any new responsibility employees need to undertake.
- Provide the name and phone number of the individual who can answer company recycling questions.

Kick off your program and issue recycling containers

To officially start your program, issue a memo signed by your CEO which is directed to all employees. The memo should highlight the benefits of recycling and describe the specifics of your program.

Listing the materials that employees can recycle, the location of the bins and the responsibility of each employee and will set your program up for success. Stress the seriousness of contamination and how it can make or break your recycling program. Respond to employees' questions or problems quickly.

With any new program, you will be asking people to change their behavior somewhat. The success of your program depends on whether you make it as easy for employees to recycle as possible.

Stationing one floor container for every fifteen to twenty employees throughout your office is optimal. Clearly labeling the containers, "For Mixed Office Paper Only," "For Computer Paper Only," "For Commingled Aluminum Cans, Glass Bottles, and Plastic Bottles Only," or "For Newspaper Only," will help to prevent employees and visitors from using the floor containers as trash cans.

Placing regular trash cans near the recycling containers will also help to minimize unwanted trash. But, recycling containers should look different than your trash cans to avoid confusion. Most waste haulers and recycling companies will supply floor containers; however, you may want to purchase your own containers to match your office decor.

Common work areas, such as copiers, mail rooms or printer locations provide the best central area to place floor containers for office waste paper. Beverage collection containers can be placed near high-traffic areas such as elevators, or in employee cafeterias and break rooms.

Publicize your program

It is important to reinforce the new recycling practices. You can do that by keeping the employees involved and motivated. Promotional methods include: paycheck insert reminders, goal chart or progress board and contests among departments. If you have a company newsletter, be sure to submit articles about the program. Quantities recycled, revenue earned (if any) and where the proceeds are going, disposal cost savings, and any problems such as putting trash into the floor containers or low participation rates can all be highlighted in follow-up memos or employee newsletters. Continual reminders will help maintain a successful program. Employees won't participate if they don't know how the program works.

Evaluate your program's success

Evaluate the success of your recycling program on a regular basis. Take note of the following:

- Can you reduce your trash pick-ups now that the company is diverting recyclable/compostable materials?
- What percentage of material is being recycled/composted?
- Is the program cost-effective?
- Have there been any employee complaints or suggestions?
- How can the program be improved?