

# Waste management at work

## Part two Putting Ideas into Practice

By recycling paper, cardboard, metals, plastics and glass, and by composting food or plant wastes, you can keep useful products out of landfills and incinerators and also reduce the harmful environmental impacts associated with the extraction of natural resources, including oil spills, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and water pollution.

Choosing products manufactured from recycled content, such as paper, also helps reduce the burden of pollution from virgin resource extraction and processing.

### WASTE AUDITS

A waste audit is an analysis of your building's waste stream. It can identify what types of recyclable materials and waste your office generates and how much of each type is recovered for recycling or is discarded.

Using the data collected during a waste audit, your organisation can identify ways to reduce waste and enhance its recycling efforts and determine the potential for cost savings.

By designing a more efficient waste disposal program, your business can increase the amount of paper, plastic, and metals that it recycles, which reduces air and water pollution, helps curb global warming, and conserve natural resources.

Some local governments may be willing to conduct a free waste audit for your business. Contact yours to find out more about the services it provides.

Your waste collector may also be

willing to conduct a waste audit to identify other waste reduction opportunities.

### AUDITS SAVE MONEY

Recycling and composting can save money through avoided disposal and hauling costs. Many recyclable items can also be sold on the market as a source of revenue. A waste audit can help your company identify these potential savings and revenue opportunities. Many companies have realised savings through their efforts to increase recycling.

### WHAT'S A WASTE AUDIT?

During a waste audit, the auditor investigates the sources, composition, weight, volume, and destinations of the waste that your organisation generates. Some government or not-for-profit organisations will perform this service free of charge, or it can be done in-house.

By learning more about the trash your business generates, you can be better informed about the products you buy that contribute to waste and be better prepared to more efficiently dispose of it, saving money and improving your organisation's environmental performance.

### HOW TO DO AN AUDIT

Performing a waste audit is an effective way to learn more about the trash your business generates. In order to create an accurate representation of your waste stream and recycling efforts, consider performing multiple waste audits at different times of the year.



### **1. Ensure proper safety measures are in place**

Provide thick gloves to sorters, and make sure everyone has had a tetanus shot. Involve your organisation's occupational health and safety representatives as appropriate.

### **2. Ensure proper confidentiality measures**

The waste stream may contain personal and private information that should be kept confidential. Ensure that measures are in place to protect both personal and organisational confidentiality in auditing of documents.

### **3. Enlist assistance from all stakeholders**

The help of senior managers, departmental managers, building managers, employee representatives, health and safety representatives, and waste haulers is invaluable to a successful waste audit. These personnel can assist in gathering important information about your organisation's waste and can also provide logistical insights about your recycling and waste management system.

### **4. Keep the timing of the audit a secret**

By keeping the timing of a waste audit secret, you ensure that the waste you analyse is a truly representative sample of the waste your business generates at a particular time of year. If people are informed in advance of the date of a waste audit, they may increase their recycling efforts or otherwise alter their normal daily behaviour.

### **5. Collect waste**

Work with all relevant and re-



sponsible people such as departmental representatives, waste haulers and staff to collect the waste. Make sure that everything collected is clearly labelled by date and location.

### **6. Sort waste**

Sort the collected waste by type, noting paper; cardboard; recyclable and non-recyclable plastics, glass, and metals; food waste; batteries; and so on. Make sure to note recyclable materials that have not been diverted for recycling.

### **7. Analyse the waste and make recommendations**

What is the composition of your organisation's waste stream? How much can your company increase its recycling? By what methods can your company increase its recycling? How can waste be collected more efficiently? What are the opportunities to reduce waste generation? How can your business save money by altering its waste-management systems?

beneficial activities. It is relatively simple and painless and a great way to involve staff at all levels in your company's environmental priorities.

Recycling protects habitat and saves energy, water, and resources such as trees and metal ores. By recycling paper, cardboard, metals, plastics, and glass, you can help reduce the harmful impacts associated with the extraction of the raw materials used to make these resources, including greenhouse gas emissions, oil spills, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and water pollution.

Manufacturing products from recovered materials is less polluting than producing the same products from newly harvested or extracted virgin materials. Making paper from recycled fibres, for example, uses less energy and water and produces less air and water pollution than making paper from trees. Despite the obvious benefits and wide acceptance of recycling, it can sometimes be challenging to design an effective and efficient program.

## **Recycling**

Recycling is one of the most common of all environmentally

Many local governments offer technical assistance to help

businesses implement a recycling program or improve an existing one. Contact your local government's recycling or waste department to learn more about the services it provides.

Shipping materials such as polystyrene foam (styrofoam), bubble wrap, and loose polystyrene fill can account for a lot of company waste. Reusing these materials in future shipping can avoid the unnecessary production and purchase of these plastics and reduce your company's waste. Consider using reusable transport packaging to reduce your shipping waste and conserve resources.

## RECYCLING SAVES

Recycling and composting can save money through avoided disposal and hauling costs. Many recyclable items can also be sold on the market and be a source of revenue, although market conditions vary by material and by region.

A waste audit will help your company identify these potential savings and revenue opportunities. Many companies have realised savings through their efforts to increase recycling.

## Hazardous waste

When batteries, thermostats, electronics, oil, and other potentially hazardous wastes are improperly disposed of they can harm public health and the environment.

Batteries and e-waste such as computers, printers, and mobile phones, contain toxic heavy met-

als such as lead, mercury and cadmium. When they are thrown away in the normal garbage system they end up in landfills, and these toxic compounds can leak into soil and water, polluting lakes and streams and making them unfit for drinking, swimming, fishing, and supporting wildlife.

In addition to making sure these wastes are disposed of correctly, where possible, organisations should purchase less toxic and reusable products to reduce the amount of potentially hazardous wastes needing disposal.

Many local governments and organisations such as mobile phone suppliers offer assistance to companies that wish to safely dispose of these products. Contact your local government's recycling or waste management department to learn more about the services it provides.

There are also a range of charitable organisations that accept donations of old computers and related products.

You may also want to consider incorporating green language into future contracts with suppliers of electronics equipment, specifying that they take back these products at the end of their use for recycling and environmentally responsible disposal.

## Water use

Every year, almost half the world's population lives without a steady supply of clean drinking water. Water conservation is especially important in light of the looming pressures of global

warming, which threatens to significantly increase evaporation as well as the frequency of droughts. Water conservation strategies such as water meters, low-flow fixtures, and more efficient landscaping techniques, can help ensure that future generations have access to the water they need, while saving the company money.

## WATER AUDITS

Water audits analyse an organisation's water use and identify ways to make it more efficient. Audits review domestic, sanitary, landscaping, and process water use and identify ways to increase a facility's efficiency. They are often performed for free and can save your company money by reducing water use and its associated costs. Contact your water utility to learn more about the services they provide.

## WATER AUDITS SAVE

Many organisations have taken measures to install water-saving devices with a long-term view to both saving money and being more environmentally friendly.

Upgraded toilet facilities including low-flow toilet systems, more efficient taps and shower facilities – including flow restrictors, leak detection systems and high efficiency aerators – are just a few improvements that can be made to your organisation's operations.

Other options also include rainwater collection, wastewater re-use and educating employees at all levels of the organisation on the economic and environmental importance of water conservation.