

Recycling and Waste Reduction at Work

Small Businesses

Small businesses can pose many challenges when it comes to implementing a waste reduction and recycling program. The information in this fact sheet is designed to help owners of small office-type businesses in Gaston County understand the importance of having a recycling and waste reduction program, and to provide guidance on overcoming some of the barriers.



How Does Waste Reduction and Recycling Benefit Us?

Improves Public Image. The public appreciates businesses and organizations that make an effort to be environmentally-friendly. In fact, having a waste reduction and recycling program can help increase your business.

Improves the Bottom Line. Waste reduction increases your operating efficiency, reduces the trash produced, and decreases the number of supplies that need to be purchased. This all adds up to spending less, which saves money for you.

Protects Our Resources. All of the environmental reasons that you've heard for recycling are still true. Recycling helps conserve natural resources, saves energy, reduces the need for landfills, decreases pollution caused by manufacturing products, and generally helps protect the environment for future generations.

Waste Reduction and Recycling... **Easy Tips for Small Businesses**

In the Office:

- Use e-mail and maintain electronic files instead of paper whenever possible.
- Make double-sided copies whenever possible.
- Establish a web site or create an e-mail list to disseminate information rather than printing memos and handouts.
- Keep letterhead on computers and print as needed rather than keeping a stock of pre-printed letterhead.
- Practice preventive maintenance on equipment to prolong the service life.
- Sell or donate unused or unwanted furniture and equipment rather than throwing it in the trash.
- Reuse office supplies like file folders and manila envelopes whenever possible.
- Order items in bulk when possible to cut down on packaging materials.
- Purchase supplies with minimal or recyclable packaging.
- Purchase office supplies (copy paper, envelopes, file folders, etc.) made with recycled-content materials.
- Reduce the use of disposable items wherever possible.
- Flatten and recycle cardboard rather than throwing it in the trash.
- Convert scrap paper, outdated forms, and old letterhead into memo pads.
- Recycle office paper, drink containers, and toner cartridges.

Housekeeping and Janitorial:

- Purchase non-toxic multi-purpose cleaners rather than purchasing specific cleaners for each job.
- Buy cleaners in concentrated forms whenever possible and refill existing containers from these.
- Purchase recycled-content trash bags, waste containers, and storage bins.
- Consider purchasing paper towels and toilet paper made with recycled-content materials.



Overcoming the Barriers to Recycling

Small businesses can be in a difficult position when it comes to the financial aspects of starting a recycling program. Depending on how your trash is handled – if the city picks up your trash, for example – a recycling program may not decrease your trash disposal costs. If you fall into this category, consider the following ways to make sure that a recycling program does not increase your costs:

- Look for companies that will accept multiple materials for recycling. For example, some paper recycling companies will also accept plastic bottles or aluminum cans.
- Check with nearby businesses to see if they already have recycling programs in place. If so, will they let you piggy-back on their program by using their recycling bins?
- If you are in a business park or a multi-tenant building, work with the other businesses to establish a program that is cost-effective for everyone.
- If you rent your business space, work with the property owner to develop a program.
- Use the County recycling centers. If you have small amounts of several different materials, the drop-off centers may be the most efficient way to recycle.

Before You Get Started:

There are a few questions that you need to answer before you try to set up a recycling program. The answers to these questions will help you decide on the best way to implement a recycling and waste reduction program.

- Do you pay for trash removal, or is hauling provided by the municipality?
- What type(s) and how many trash containers do you use (roll-off containers, dumpsters, roll-out carts, etc.)?
- How many trash pickups are scheduled each week, and what is the cost per pickup?
- How is trash removed from inside the building? Do you contract janitorial services, or are services provided by your staff?

How Do We Get Started?


1. **Get Committed.** To be effective, a waste reduction and recycling program must have support from owners and management. Demonstrate your support and commitment by ensuring that time and resources are available. You may want to designate a staff member or a group of employees to be the “Coordinator” or “Green Team” in charge of the program.

2. **Know Your Waste.** Perform a waste assessment so that you can see what materials make up your waste stream. Examine the contents of dumpsters and trash cans and talk to janitorial staff about the materials that they see. In an office setting, you will mostly see paper products (copy paper, cardboard boxes, etc.), but you may also find other recyclables. Contact the Gaston County Solid Waste and Recycling Division at 704-922-7729 for more information or assistance with waste assessments.

3. **Determine Your Collection and Transportation Options.** Depending on the materials that you see in the waste stream, you will need to determine what material(s) will be the easiest to collect and recycle. Don't forget that the recyclable materials will be generated inside the building, but at some point they will need to be moved outside the building and transported to the recycling facility. This means that you will need to consider both collection and hauling options before implementing a program.

Collection Considerations.

- a. **Where Will Recyclables be Generated?** In an office building, where paper will be the largest part of the waste stream, recyclables will be generated in individual offices, as well as at centralized printers and copy machines. Will you only be collecting paper, or are you planning to collect drink cans and bottles from break rooms or kitchens? Regardless of where the recyclables will be generated, make sure that there is an easy way for recyclables to be moved outside (carts to transport the recyclables outside, aisles and walkways that are wide enough for the carts, etc.).

 **TIP:** Always include your employees in the planning process – especially the ones that will have an active role in collecting or sorting the materials. This will improve participation and morale since they will feel that it is “their” program rather than something they are being required to do.

- b. **Where Will Recyclables be Collected?** If you are concentrating on office or mixed paper recycling, you will need to determine whether to have a recycling bin in every office, or just in certain areas. If you are collecting drink containers, you will need to decide whether to place bins in waiting rooms or public areas, or just to have recycling available in break rooms/kitchen areas. Don't forget to check the areas where you will be collecting recyclables to make sure that there is enough space for the collection bins that you want to use.
- c. **Who Will Collect the Recycling?** Are you planning for your staff to be responsible for taking their own recycling to a certain location, or will janitorial staff be responsible for the collections? If you are planning for the janitorial staff to handle recycling, then consider how janitorial services are handled. If you contract janitorial services, is recycling something that you can add in to your current contract, or will the contract need to be re-negotiated?

Hauling Options. There are a number of options available when it comes to transporting your recyclables, and the best option for your company will depend on the amount and type of recycling being generated.

- a. **Hauling by the Recycling Company.** In the Gaston County area, there are a number of local recycling companies, some of which will provide recycling containers and pickups for certain materials. As a general rule, you will need to generate a certain amount of recycling material for the company to provide containers and pickups for free, but some companies may be willing to rent containers or provide pickups at a lower cost than trash containers.
- b. **Hauling by Your Trash Hauler.** You can also check with your waste hauler to see about amending your contract to support recycling. Once you begin separating out recyclable materials, you should be able to decrease the number of pickups and/or the number (or size) of trash containers available. Many waste haulers are able to designate a truck just for recycling collections, so you may be able to vary containers and pickups accordingly and end with a recycling program that does not increase your contract costs.
- c. **Hauling to Drop-off Sites.** If you will not be generating enough materials for options (a) or (b) to work, there are six County-run recycling drop-off centers located around the County for your convenience. These sites will accept mixed paper, newspaper, cardboard, aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and glass and steel cans for recycling. For more information on site locations and hours, see the back page of this fact sheet.
4. **Set Goals.** Are you trying to reduce waste or costs by a certain amount, or do you simply want your staff members to feel that they are doing something worthwhile? How will you determine whether or not your program is a success? Are you planning to track the amount of material recycled, your cost savings, or the environmental impacts of your program? Have a clear idea of the information that you want or need to track. That way, when you implement your program, you can be sure of getting the information that you need.

Questions to Ask Recycling Companies

When you are looking for a company to take your recyclable materials, there are a number of questions to ask. The following questions can help assess which companies best fit your needs.

- What material(s) does the company accept for recycling?
- Can the company provide recycling containers? If so,
 - Is there a charge?
 - How much of the material do you need to generate?
 - Does the company empty the containers for free?
- How do your recyclables need to be separated (i.e. can you mix all types of paper, or does cardboard need to be kept separate from office paper)?
- Will they pay for your recycling, or do you need to have a certain quality or quantity?
- Do recyclables need to be prepared a certain way (i.e. paper baled or bottles flattened) before the company will accept them?

5. Develop a Plan and Educate Your Employees. Once you have decided which recycling options will work best for you, develop those ideas into a recycling plan. Make sure that everyone involved is on the same page. Let staff know where recycling bins will be located, and what materials are acceptable in the bins. Anyone that will be collecting and/or sorting materials needs to know how the materials should be separated, how materials will be transported to the recycling company, and where and how materials will be stored. Remember that education is an on-going process, and you will continually need to remind everyone about container locations and acceptable materials. If you have a large enough staff, you might want to provide periodic education sessions for employees, just to keep them up-to-date on the program. If you have a new employee orientation program, make sure that you spend a few minutes of the session explaining the recycling program.

6. Implement Your Program. Place your containers and begin recycling. Just remember that your recycling program is a work in progress, and you may end up having to change collection methods or procedures. Make sure that you take the time to evaluate your recycling program and gauge whether or not you are meeting your goals. You can also look for ways to make the program more efficient. To make things as easy as possible make sure that you continue to provide educational materials to everyone that can participate in the program. Post signs in recycling areas and make sure that bins are properly labeled.

Where Can I Find Out More?

The North Carolina Department of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (NC DPPEA) has information for small businesses on their web site. Find out more at www.p2pays.org and clicking on the "Small Businesses" link.

For more information on recycling in the Gaston County area, and for help developing your program, contact the Gaston County Solid Waste and Recycling Division at 704-922-7729.

For your convenience, Gaston County maintains six recycling drop-off centers. Recycling materials can be dropped of at these sites at no charge.

