

Waste Management/Prevention

Making Waste an Unwelcome Guest

Environmentally aware travelers represent a growing market for the hospitality industry. Hotels, motels, and bed & breakfasts that strive to be energy efficient, conserve resources, and prevent pollution can distinguish themselves from those facilities which don't make protecting the environment a priority. One important aspect of an environmental friendly facility is an effective waste management program. In addition to protecting the environment, lodging facilities will gain from decreasing costs and liabilities. Waste management can result in purchasing savings and be used as a marketing tool to attract environmental conscientious clientele. The following guide provides tips on how to manage and reduce waste for all lodging facilities.

The foundation for any waste management program is the three R's - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Typically the initial goal is to reduce waste materials by never acquiring them in the first place. This can be done by eliminating excess packaging, purchasing low phosphates or non-toxic cleaning agents, using email and other electronic media, etc. After reducing all feasible waste the focus changes to looking for ways to reuse materials such as reusing old table cloths or bed sheets for cleaning rags, office paper for scratch work or donating older electronic equipment to a nearby school. The final step is to recycle all the remaining materials that are accepted by the local haulers, processors, and material handlers.

1. HOW TO DEVELOP A WASTE PREVENTION PROGRAM

Before implementing specific waste prevention policies and practices, it is important to establish a Waste Prevention program. The following are the basic steps to developing a Waste Prevention Program according to New York City's Department of Sanitation:

1. Demonstrate Management Support
2. Conduct a Waste Audit/Assessment
3. Set Priorities & Goals
4. Program Implementation
5. Monitor, Evaluate, and Fine-tune the Program

1. Demonstrate Management Support

The most successful waste prevention ideas often come from the staff doing the front line work. They can see what works and what doesn't. Top management can establish an atmosphere that fosters creativity and the sharing of ideas doing the following:

- Establish an Environmental Coordinator or Green Team representing the key functional areas within the organization.
- Develop and include a waste prevention policy as part of a broader environmental policy.
- Solicit employee ideas from each department.
- Make managers responsible for waste disposal in their area. Given this responsibility, staff will likely develop ideas on how to prevent waste.
- Educate staff frequently on topics and publicize their accomplishments.

2. Conduct a Waste Audit/Assessment

The key step in successfully managing wastes is to become familiar with the facility's waste stream. A waste audit is an assessment of what materials are being purchased, used, recycled or disposed. Walk through the facility and identify what wastes are being produced and why. Look in garbage cans, recycling bins, and dumpsters to get a feel for which materials are currently ending up where. Think about potential opportunities to reduce, reuse, or recycle the wastes. Is there a costly waste that can be eliminated by purchasing non-toxic or recyclable alternatives? Is there a particular department that creates most of the waste? Are there some easily recyclable wastes that contribute to the disposal costs such as: kitchen waste, cardboard, newspapers, office paper, etc.? Can you purchase an alternative that eliminates a waste, perhaps a reusable item rather than a disposable? Is there a high-cost, frequently purchased item that can be replaced with a more durable, longer lasting item? Few facilities can address all their waste issues at once. An audit provides the information that allows the hotel to determine where to focus their waste management efforts. The table to the right contains the results of a study, conducted by the city of New York, examining the composition of waste in its hotels.

Paper (includes cardboard)	39.9%
Organics (food, yard waste, etc.)	34.5%
Glass	7.6%
Plastic	7.1%
Metals	6.1%
Other	4.8%

3. Set Priorities & Goals

Once you've determined where to focus your waste management efforts you can set priorities and establish program goals. Consider the following:

- Quantity that can be avoided
- Costs that can be avoided
- Ease of implementation
- Customer relations goals
- Community relations
- Degree of staff cooperation
- Relationships with suppliers

4. Program Implementation

To ensure that the program is implemented effectively:

- Announce new policies and practices
- Provide staff the resources they need for the change
- Train and educate staff about new policies and procedures
- Motivate staff—offer incentives, recognition, and rewards for staff who develop ideas or participate beyond expectation

5. Monitor, Evaluate, and Fine-tune the Program

It may take time to achieve a noticeable reduction in the waste. This is why monitoring, evaluating, and fine-tuning your program is so important. Set criteria for monitoring and evaluating. Are there some aspects to check status on monthly? quarterly? annually? Areas to evaluate include:

- Savings in purchases
- Increases in productivity
- Reductions in operating costs
- Increases in recycled-content purchases
- Reductions in disposal and recycling costs
- Reductions in total waste and recyclable materials (some wastes may be shifted to recyclables, it is important to evaluate the program as a whole)

A successful waste management program will result in cost savings, some immediately and some down the line. Be sure to share the status of the program with staff. They need to know of successes and failures. In addition, when there are successes or during goal setting, submit this information to a local recycling or waste reduction contest. This shares your efforts with the community and could earn your facility special recognition and awards.

2. GREENING THE GUEST ROOMS

Depending on the property type and customer base, implementing some basic waste management changes in guest rooms could pay big dividends. There are many ways to reduce the waste produced in the guestrooms. A good place to start is to question the presentation and packaging of the amenities offered to the guests. There are several underused amenities, such as daily newspapers and shower caps, which should be provided only upon request. Thus, reducing the amount of waste produced and saving money by eliminating unnecessary purchases. Several other examples of how to reduce the amount of waste produced in guest rooms are:

- Install refillable dispensers for shampoo, conditioner, lotion, etc.
- Encourage guests to take used bars of soap home.
- Donate useful products, such as linens and furniture, to charities.
- Reuse damaged linens as aprons or chef scarves.
- Reuse stained bath towels as cleaning cloths.
- Provide newspapers, magazines, etc. only in common areas.
- Use reusable products with food and beverage services.



As much as 80% of the waste produced in guestrooms is recyclable. However, recycling bins must be conveniently located for guests to use them. The typical set-up consists of recycling bins located in common areas such as elevator lobbies. An even better option would be to place bins inside guestrooms. Bins can be located underneath desks or in closets. Another alternative would be to ask guests to leave recyclables on the desks, bathroom counters, dressers, or tables so that the housekeeping staff does not need to dig through the trash.

3. OFFICES

Another area where the hospitality industry can make improvements to their waste management program is staff offices. Almost all waste generated from offices is recyclable. Contact the local processors to verify what materials they accept.

The waste assessment will indicate how much office waste is being generated. Once the types of waste being generated is determined an efficient and effective recycling program can be implemented. The next step is to educate staff on the office recycling program and receive their commitment to participate. Typical office recyclables include:

- Paper
 - White, mixed, newspaper, magazines
 - Cardboard (boxboard and corrugated)
 - Telephone directories
- Electronic media and equipment*
 - Disks
 - Computers
 - Copiers/Scanners/Fax Machines
 - Phones



*Please refer to [Section 5. Electronic Waste](#) for more information on proper disposal/recycling of electronic waste.

4. KITCHEN/RESTAURANT

In most hospitality industries paper waste is the largest waste material, followed closely by organic waste. Kitchens are responsible for some paper waste and almost all organic waste. However, there are some things that can be done to more effectively manage kitchen wastes, thus saving the facility money and protecting the environment. Kitchen's can start by



eliminating the use of disposable plates, bowls, cups, dinnerware, napkins, tablecloths, etc. They can also attempt to reduce the packaging materials which accompany food and beverage shipments by contacting their vendors directly. Another way to reduce packaging is to buy items in bulk and eliminate single serve items such as, sugar packets, coffee creamers, and individual cereal boxes, replacing them with their bulk counterparts.



As for organic waste, kitchens can make arrangements to donate unserved food to local shelters or food banks. Also, depending on a facilities surroundings it might be possible to compost organic waste and use the composted soil around the grounds as needed for landscaping. Yard waste can also be used in compost or chipped and used as mulch.



5. ELECTRONIC WASTE

Electronic waste is a growing concern in today's world. Rapid advances in technology and expanding demand for new features accelerate the generation of "obsolete" electronic equipment. The hospitality industry generates significant amounts of electronic waste, typically in the form of office equipment, electric lamps, televisions, and DVD players/VCRs. Electrical equipment is usually made up of three basic components: metals, glass, and plastics. Some of the heavy metals (lead, mercury, cadmium, and chromium) are classified as hazardous and have been linked to kidney, cardiovascular, and nervous system damage. The EPA estimates half of all heavy metals found in U.S. landfills can be traced to discarded electronics.

Before disposing of "old" electronic equipment it should first be determined if it still has value. Often it is possible to donate usable or repairable items to charities, schools, or other foundations that specialize in refurbishing equipment. Donating electronic equipment is a good cause and it might be possible to obtain tax benefits. However, be sure to clean computer hard-drives and properly destroy any confidential information before making a donation.

If donation or reuse of electronic equipment is no longer practical equipment can be recycled for recovery of metal, plastics, glass, and other materials. Contact local processors to determine what types of electronic waste they accept and what the charges are. Also, contact the local Goodwill store, they may recycle the electronic waste free of charge. If they do not accept electronic waste, please visit the [Michigan Department of Environmental Quality \(DEQ\) Recycling](#) website for information on other recycling options. Please see [Section 8. Resources](#) for additional information and links pertaining to electronic waste disposal.

6. HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS/TOXIC WASTE

Depending on the facility, it might be necessary to dispose of some amounts of common household hazardous waste. Many cleaners, pesticides, paints, stains, and personal care products are classified as hazardous. The simplest way around having to dispose of these products is to not buy them in the first place. Usually alternatives exist that are not as hazardous to the environment. Some simple tips to reduce household hazardous waste are:

- Read the labels of products to determine if they are hazardous
- Use products according to manufacturer instructions
- Buy only what you need, disposing of excess can be costly

If disposing of hazardous waste cannot be avoided, options for proper disposal will vary based on location and facility size. Smaller establishments which produce little hazardous waste can refer to the [DEQ Household Hazardous Waste](#) website for information on collection programs in the local area and contact them to determine if they will accept waste from small businesses. Larger hospitality facilities should refer to the [Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generator](#) (facilities generating less than 220 lbs per month) or the [Small Quantity Generator](#) (between 220 and 1000lbs per month) guidelines produced by the DEQ for hazardous waste information and regulations.

7. BUYING RECYCLED

One final initiative that can be done as part of an effective waste management strategy is to commit to buying recycled products. Buying recycled products stimulates markets for recyclable materials. It also provides incentives for manufacturers to use more recyclables in production, which in turn prevents pollution and conserves natural resources and energy. Five steps to establishing a buy recycled program are:

1. Obtain support from management and employees
2. Develop a policy and set goals
3. Locate products through vendors and the [Recycled Materials Market Directory \(RMMD\)](#)
4. Promote buying recycled both in-house and within the community
5. Monitor the program

8. RESOURCES

[Michigan Recycling Coalition \(MRC\)](#) - Contains contact information for MRC members, many of whom are local recycling coordinators and collection program managers.

[Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) eCycling](#) - Electronic waste donation and recycling information.

[Pollution Prevention Pays \(P2\) Hospitality](#) - Information on “greening” the hospitality industry including tips on waste reduction.

[Waste Management Guide, Used Electric Lamps and Small Ballasts](#) - Document produced by the Michigan DEQ providing information on disposal of lamps.