

Recycling: It starts with you

A Guide to Recycling at Work



Be part of the solution: **Recycle!**

Paper recycling is one of the great environmental success stories of our day. Americans are recovering record amounts of paper for recycling – more than 53 percent of the paper consumed in the U.S. in 2006. While this is great news for the environment, there is more that can be done. Continuing to increase paper recovery will require the renewed commitment of the millions of Americans who recycle at home, work, and school every day.

This guide is designed to help increase paper recovery from one of the areas with the most potential for growth – offices. Paper is a vital part of our daily lives - help extend the life of these renewable products by collecting them for recycling.

- Offices have a high volume of a valuable, recyclable resource – paper
- Recovered fiber goes into making new paper products we use in our daily lives
- Recycling offers businesses the opportunity to show environmental and community stewardship
- Every ton of recovered paper saves 3.3 cubic yards of landfill space

For more statistics, case studies and reference materials on paper recycling, visit **www.paperrecycles.org**.



Steps to Workplace Recycling

1 Gather the Facts

Assess the discards

Conduct an audit to determine the amount and types of materials that are recyclable. For most offices this will mean a variety of papers. An audit will also provide information about where most of the recyclables are generated within the company. Consider the possibility of seasonal or business-cycle fluctuations.

Target materials for recycling

Identify all materials that are potentially recyclable. Evaluate how much could be recycled and how recyclables might best be separated for collection. Target those materials that are most abundant in the recycling stream and would be the easiest to separate for recovery.

Talk to your recycler

Your recycling company can provide information about the types of materials they accept for recycling. Work with them to determine how recycling specific materials might impact your current hauling contract, services, and costs.

If your company is a tenant in a large office building, the building owners or management company may contract with the recycler. If the recycler is not able to accept the materials you want to recycle, contact a local recycling center. Smaller companies may also want to consider drop-off recycling.

Specific issues to discuss with your recycler:

- What are the potential costs and benefits of recycling?
- Will a decrease in the amount of material going to disposal help cover the costs of the program?
- Which materials can be recycled most cost effectively?
- What grades of paper are handled and what is the minimum amount required for pickup?
- How will materials need to be collected? What are the common contaminants for each material?
- Will the recycler provide updates on the quality and quantity of materials collected?
- Will additional containers or other equipment be required for the collection of recyclables?

Typical Office Recyclables

Common recyclables found in the workplace include:

- Office papers (e.g., copy paper, letterhead, notebook paper, envelopes, file folders)
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Shipping (corrugated) boxes
- Paperboard packaging
- Glass, plastic, steel, and aluminum containers

2

Design a Program

Get management support

Gain the support of your company's top management for a recycling program. Before going to management, arm yourself with information that shows program value or identifies a need to improve an existing recycling program.

- Target the appropriate decision maker. Who can make the program happen?
- Focus on costs, impact on productivity, staffing, environmental benefits, and positive public relations.
- Request that one individual be assigned responsibility for the program.
- Get the support of company leaders to help champion recycling.

Organize collection procedures

Elements to consider:

- **Containers** – Determine the size and number of containers needed to implement the program. Two containers at each desk – one for recycling and one for trash – is optimal. Use color to help identify what goes in each bin.
- **Collection locations** – Have at least one common area collection container for every 15-20 employees. As space permits, put containers in common areas near copiers, in mailrooms, and at printer locations. Be sure to consider fire and safety codes that may affect storing collected paper.
- **Signage** – Post signs on bins and above collection containers indicating what materials are acceptable and what should be kept out. Use pictures or other visuals when possible.
- **Employee participation** – Collection procedures should be as simple as possible to improve employee participation and to allow for the most effective separation of recyclables.
- **Custodial staff** – Determine who will be responsible for moving recyclables from offices to collection locations and eventually to large recycling containers. In most cases custodial staff will be responsible for some or all of this process. Staff and custodial teams will need to be trained in these new processes.

Start It Up

For small organizations it may be possible to start a recycling program all at once. For larger companies, begin with a short pilot program in one department or floor to test the new system before full office implementation.

- Pilot test the recycling program in a small area or division of the company. Check collection procedures, answer questions about what's accepted in the program, and monitor custodial staff. Resolve problems and make appropriate changes before expanding to the entire company.
- Phase-in the program one department or floor at a time. Take advantage of the opportunity to monitor employee response and gauge the amount of recyclables collected.
- Plan a kick-off event. Start the program with a bang. Be sure to include management in the event, and use it to make sure employees understand what, where, and how to recycle.

3 Engage and Coach Employees

Employees make a recycling program happen – they are your most valuable asset. Educate employees, talk up the recycling program, and share results. Communicate positively, clearly, and often. Consider these tips:

- Use “recycling champions” – Identify employees who are enthusiastic about the program and let them help you sell it to other employees.
- Set up recycling teams – Form teams among departments, floors, or divisions. Organize competitions to determine which team is recycling the most. This will help spread the word about the program and generate enthusiasm.
- Include information in employee orientation materials – Incorporate the company recycling guidelines into new employee orientation materials and presentations.
- Use a variety of communications tools
 - Email recycling tips and reminders
 - Post or distribute flyers
 - Organize company-wide or division recycling education seminars
 - Post signage in and around employee common areas
 - Include recycling information on the company website, newsletters, and other internal communications
 - Arrange a “bag lunch” to explain the guidelines and purpose of the program, and to recognize outstanding individual or group/divisions recycling efforts
- Create incentives – Motivate employees with contests and rewards for achieving recycling goals.
- Monitor recycling bins regularly – Inspect bins, create a system to remind employees about contaminants, and praise employees for a job well done.
- Repeat – Circulate communications frequently about the recycling program and help reinforce positive employee recycling behaviors.

Keep it Clean

To ensure office paper retains its highest possible value, keep contaminants out during collection.

Common paper contaminants include:

- Food and items covered with food, such as cups, plates, and wrappers
- Tapes, glues, and adhesive labels
- Medical or hazardous waste
- Deeply dyed papers (dark and neon)
- Computer disks, slides, rubber bands, and metal fasteners
- Glass, aluminum, and plastic packaging

4

Measure and Share Results

Track results to show the merits of recycling and motivate employees. When management and employees see progress momentum for the recycling program will take off. Achieving recycling goals, lowering costs, realizing environmental benefits, and improving participation are all opportunities to show off program successes.

Keep track

Track the amount recycled for each material. Work with the recycler to gather this information regularly, such as monthly. Use a database or other system to record and store data. Specific information that should be gathered includes:

- **Quantity of recyclables collected by material** – The amount is typically reported in tons, although measuring pounds can also be meaningful and may be more realistic for your office. Totals by floor, department, or other division may be useful.
- **Quality of recyclables collected** – Excess contamination can cause recyclables to be unmarketable to an end-use manufacturer. Get feedback on the amount and types of contamination from the recycler and incorporate findings into the employee education program.
- **Additional costs or cost savings to the business** – Recycling adds collection and processing services that may increase costs. More material going to recycling rather than disposal, however, may lower overall hauling costs. Be sure to also monitor any costs associated with operating the program.

Communicate results

Spread the word about program achievements to:

- **Employees** – Success is a great reward. Watching the recycling program grow, reaching goals, and creating benefits will motivate employees to participate.
- **The community** – Announce the recycling program to the community. Provide regular updates about the program success through media articles, local recycling events, and company outreach to the community. Also include the recycling initiative on printed materials, and on the company's website and intranet.
- **Nationally** – Enter the recycling program in a national competition to bring additional recognition to the program's best practices and results. Information about the AF&PA Recycling Awards can be found at www.paperrecycles.org.

5 Keep it up

Sustaining a workplace recycling program takes ongoing effort

- **Make it fun** – Create incentives and rewards to motivate employees.
- **Keep up communication** – Employee education is an ongoing activity. Don't let up. Keep it short, positive, and engaging.
- **Make adjustments as necessary** – Things will likely change as the program grows. Build in flexibility. Communicate any changes to employees and the reason for specific changes.
- **Get employee input** – Survey employees about the program. What's working? What isn't? What would help improve participation? Recognize employees that provide exceptional efforts to the program.
- **Set achievable goals** – Reaching goals and setting new ones builds progress and movement into the program.
- **Include everyone** – Ensure that the program is not dependent on one "champion" to succeed. A recycling program needs the participation of all employees.

Online Tools and Resources

As you prepare to launch your recycling program, visit www.paperrecycles.org for background information, statistics, communications templates, AF&PA Recycling Award best case studies and entry forms, and more.

Things to Consider

Property Management

Businesses that share an office building with other tenants will likely need to work with a property management or leasing company to plan a recycling program, as these entities typically contract with the recycler. Property management should participate in program planning and help market the program to other businesses operating in the building.

Custodial staff

Custodial staff is critical to the success of a recycling program. Ensure that management clearly outlines their role in the program and communicates roles and responsibilities to cleaning staff. Build ongoing training into the program for building maintenance and other personnel who will be directly involved in recycling collection.

Community partnerships

Reach out to the local recycling community for help and support. Assistance from community and business leaders that have experience and knowledge about workplace recycling will vastly enhance the value of your program. They can also be great advocates and mentors.

Committed to Recycling? Tell us about it!

Did you know that the AF&PA Recycling Awards recognize outstanding business, community, school, and college/university paper recycling efforts? Visit www.paperrecycles.org today for award criteria, deadlines, and entry forms, along with interactive features and additional paper recycling resources.

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