

Recycling Can Mean Big Savings

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Recently I had the opportunity to speak at a conference on Energy and Pollution Prevention. At first glance you might wonder how those two diverse subjects would be covered at the same conference. I know I did. There was a special session related to the lodging industry and, wow, were my eyes opened.

The 510-room Grove Park Inn, where the conference was held, began its recycling program in 1991 by hiring a full time recycling coordinator. They began recycling cardboard, aluminum cans, glass bottles, paper, plastic ink cartridges and kitchen grease and solid fat. They also practice what they call “pre-cycling” which means that they buy recycled products and conserve water and energy.

Why should hotel and motel owners be interested in reducing waste? In my State alone the lodging industry contributes a sizable portion of the 7 million tons of waste discarded annually. Across this State the lodging industry caters to millions of visitors each year, providing more than 100,000 rooms. Large volumes of waste are produced in the diverse range of facilities by guest rooms, kitchens, lounges, restaurants, laundries, offices and conference rooms.

I was surprised to learn that guest rooms can produce as much as 28 pounds (61 kilos) per day of assorted wastes depending on the number of occupants and the type of property. Most of what is thrown away is recyclable in one way or another.

Why Reduce and Recycle?

There are several reasons for beginning a good recycling program. They include complying with State waste management laws and regulations, improving overall image among clients, protecting the environment and of course, saving money.

Even if your local government doesn't have specific waste management laws in place it's your responsibility to do your part as a business and community leader. You can be the leader in creating a “green” image and presenting it to the public. It demonstrates your commitment to environmental stewardship.

Most people practice some form of recycling in their home environment and they expect to do so while they travel. Many hotels are discovering that their environmentally responsible practices can attract convention and conference business. Consider the following example.

The managers of the Boston Park Plaza Hotel and Towers estimates that their waste reduction program attracted US\$750,000 in new business during its first two years because of clients' desires to support “green” businesses.

Cost Savings.

You can save a significant amount of money by reducing waste and recycling waster materials. The greatest savings result from reductions in trash hauling fees. After the Walt Disney World Village began its recycling program, its garbage collection fees dropped 80%-from US\$6,000 per month to US\$1,200 per month.

Naturally your savings will be based on things like local garbage hauling fees and any dumping permit fees associated with what you have hauled away. The fees, in some cases, can be significant and so too can the savings.

In addition to saving dwindling landfill space, your waste reduction and recycling program will preserve resources, conserve energy, reduce air pollution, and save water.

Where To Begin.

If you have implemented a maintenance management program or a building wide energy management program you will find the process very similar. There are eight basic steps to planning and implementing a waste reduction and recycling program.

- Organize a waste reduction team.
- Conduct a waste assessment.
- Establish waste reduction goals.
- Secure recycling markets.
- Set up a collection and storage system.
- Buy recycled products.
- Train your staff and promote the program.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Organize A Team.

Any program, be it waste reduction or whatever, begins at the top. If the management team fully supports the program employees will follow. Be sure to involve employees in the planning stages. Establish a committee with representatives from the various departments within the facility. Their input is critical.

Conduct A Waste Assessment.

You need to know what is being thrown away before you can design a waste reduction and recycling program. Consult your current waste hauler or contact another hauler. See if your area has a recycling service for some products. By examining the contents of your facility's dumpsters and recording how often they are emptied, you can determine the types and amounts of items being discarded. You can then determine which of these items can be recycled.

Establish Goals.

Using your waste assessment as a basis, determine how you can reduce the amount of waste being produced and what materials can be reused or recycled. Set waste reduction goals for each of these approaches. For example, you might aim to reduce waster production by 10%, reuse 10% and even recycle an additional 10%. Set manageable and achievable goals so that you see some success.

Secure Recycling Markets.

Before you begin collecting recyclable materials, you must find someone to take them. This may take a bit of detective work on your part or the part of your staff. The best choices depend on the several factors. They include the size of your facility, local market conditions, and the availability of a recycling service to handle the goods. If your local government has a waste management department you might contact them for help.

Set Up A Collection And Storage System.

If you can find a recycling service they will help you to design an in-house collection and storage system. Hotel managers have found that there is usually no increase in staff required to carry out a waste reduction program. Here are several tips to reduce labor time and costs.

- Integrate the separation and collection of recyclable wastes into normal work procedures. Putting an item into a recycling container takes the same amount of time as putting it into a trashcan.
- Sort recyclable wastes the first time they are handled-for example, put corrugated boxes directly into a pile or container designated fro recycling as soon as they are unpacked.
- Handle recyclable wastes as few times as possible.

Corrugated cardboard probably makes up the greatest volume of your facility's waste stream. By recycling cardboard, you can save money on disposal costs. Depending on your recycling arrangement, you may also be able to make money from selling the cardboard. Many hotels have purchased bailers or compactors to manage their waste cardboard and get a better price for it.

The recyclable materials typically collected from guest rooms are newspapers, aluminum cans, and glass and plastic bottles. There are several ways to encourage guests

to separate their recyclable wastes. You might ask them to leave recyclable materials in a specific location in the room. You can supply a bin in each room. Try setting a special container near the elevators in each hallway or another convenient location. Add specially colored plastic bags to housekeeping carts to collect recyclable materials.

Office workers can put recyclable paper in centralized bins. These bins should be placed in areas where large amounts of waste paper are generated—for example, next to a copy machine. Each employee can keep a small box or container alongside their desk and empty it periodically into a centralized bin. Your custodial staff can be tasked to empty the containers into a specialized bin for collection.

Glass, aluminum, and plastic containers can be separated in your restaurant and lounge. Food wastes from the kitchen can be composted and grease and oil can be picked up by a recycling service.

Buy Recycled Products.

Collecting and recycling wastes is the first step in recycling, but your facility must also purchase products made from recycled materials in order to participate fully in the recycling process. Buying recycled products helps develop the market for recyclable materials and increases their value. You'll find recycled items to be comparable in quality and price to products made from new materials.

Make a commitment to buy recycled products and notify your vendors. The most common recycled products include:

- Office, copier and computer paper.
- Stationary, letterhead, envelopes, postcards, and business cards.
- Fax paper, notepads, and file folders.
- Cash register and calculator tapes.
- Forms.
- Facial tissue and toilet paper.
- Construction materials.
- Carpeting.

Train Your Staff And Promote The Program.

The success of your recycling program will also depend on training and promotion to encourage full participation by staff members and guests. Employees need ongoing training on how to collect and store wastes that are recyclable. Many hotels use table cards in guest rooms to describe the recycling program and encourage their guests to participate. Keep employees informed of the progress of your recycling program and waste reduction efforts. Send out a press release about your goals and achievements. Send a note to your competitors informing them of your program and encouraging them to start one of their own.

Establish Monitoring And Evaluation Procedures.

You will need an ongoing monitoring program to evaluate your success and to maintain continual progress in your program. Build some flexibility into your program so you can make changes when necessary. Also, make backup plans to handle any emergencies that may arise. You may need to respond to changes in your facility's operation or changes in local regulations.

Summary.

A well planned and well thought out waste reduction and recycling program can be an important part of your overall operational savings strategy. Try to think of a waste reduction program as a means of recycling cash into the operation. Think of it as a way to attract more guests and to make your facility more attractive to event planners seeking a first class facility in which to host their special event.

You can't lose.

Next month we'll explore specific ways to make recycling and waste reduction turn bigger profits for your facility. Stay tuned!

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