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How to Create a Workplace Recycling Program

1. **Select a Recycling Coordinator:** Accountability is key to the success of your recycling program. Who is best suited to lead this effort? The ideal recycling coordinator will be:
 - Enthusiastic about recycling and/or the environment
 - Well organized
 - A good communicator
 - Familiar with starting, overseeing and maintaining programs
 - In contact with the company's waste haulers, janitorial staff or contracts

2. **Decide What to Collect:** Consider that paper makes up an average of 37.5% of the waste stream. What supplies to you have on hand? What do your employees use? Make a list.

Do you use:

- Computer paper
 - Aluminum cans
 - Batteries
 - Light bulbs
 - Computers and accessories
 - Glass bottles
 - Inkjet/toner cartridges
 - Plastic bottles
 - Scrap metal
 - Telephone books, Magazines, Newspapers, Catalogs
3. **Choose a Collection Method:** To mix or not to mix? Here are the pros and cons of each option:

Source Separation: Recyclables are separated by specific type. Example:

- Paper recycling would have many bins including white paper, colored paper, cardboard, office mail, magazines/catalogs, etc.
- Plastic recycling would have bins for each type of plastic #1-7

Pros:

- Bin items are specific, with fewer questions as to what goes where
- Separated materials can have a higher market value
- It creates more environmental awareness for employees

Cons:

- It requires more recycling bins and a higher setup cost
- It takes up more space
- The recycling coordinator may have to spend time sorting materials

Determine the best type of collection method for your company.

4. **Choose a Hauling Option:** Determining how to haul your recyclables away can be one of the greatest challenges. Be realistic in planning how much your business is capable of recycling. The following are the most common hauling options available to businesses:

Drop-Off Recycling Locations: Once your bins are full, your recycling coordinator, or another volunteer, can drop off materials at a local center. Things to consider:

- Accepted Recyclables
- Contamination Guidelines
- Minimum quantity requirements
- Payment options

Pick-Up Provider: How to find the right pick-up provider for your business:

Commercial Recyclers are often more suited for businesses generating larger volumes of recyclables. Pick-up or hauling fee may apply. They may offer services including waste hauling, collection bins, educational materials and/or employee training.

Commercial Waste Haulers waiting to provide a “complete package” to their customers often offer recycling services, because they are able to make up their lost waste hauling fees with recycling revenue.

Commercial waste haulers may have volume and contamination requirements, pick-up fees and other requirements. You may be able to reduce your overall waste hauling expense, and only have to deal with one company for solid waste and recycling.

Cooperative Recycling: If your business only generates a small volume of recyclables, you can partner with a neighboring business.

By pooling your recyclables, you can qualify for pick-up by a commercial recycler or waste hauler. Cooperative recycling is popular in multi-tenant buildings or complexes, strip malls and industrial parks. Cooperative recycling also makes it easy for recyclers to coordinate pick-ups more effectively.

If you get involved with a larger company, you win because you are able to recycle at no additional expense. The larger business wins by receiving additional volume and extra revenue.

5. Set Up Recycling Bins and Guidelines

Organization is crucial to recycling. Set up clearly labeled plastic bins in places where employees will use them. Some good locations:

- A paper recycling bin and/or ink cartridge recycling bin in the copy room
- Aluminum/glass/plastic recycling in the kitchen
- An electronics recycling bin in the storage room.

Another issue to consider is contamination. Materials that are contaminated won't be recycled and could ruin larger batches of recycling. Contamination can be avoided by following these steps:

- Rinse out containers, so bins won't get dirty
- Make sure there's no food waste mixed in with recyclables (e.g. cardboard pizza box with oil remains) and that materials aren't mixed (e.g. aluminum cans with paper) if your recycler requires separation
- When in doubt, throw it out.

Internal Collection Container Locations: Your program will only be as effective as how easy it is for employees to participate. Bin quantity and location plays a huge role in this. Here are a few options:

Desk Side or Desktop Containers: All employees will go through paper. If nothing else, from office mail. By placing a paper recycling bin next to the trash at each employee's desk, it will become second nature for them to recycle paper. These can be purchased from a container company, or you can simply use a cardboard box.

Central Collection Containers: These containers are for office common areas, and should be placed strategically in areas where products will be collected. An office copy room is an ideal area for a paper collection container, just like the office kitchen would be for aluminum and glass recycling. Common sizes for central containers are 20 to 50 gallon plastic bins.

Final Collection Containers: These are often provided by the recycling service provider and serve as a final destination for all your recyclables before they are picked up or dropped off. Products from desktop and central collection bins will be unloaded into these large bins, which are usually hampers on rollers or plastic barrels with lids and wheels.

6. **Monitor Your Program:** Once your recycling program is in place, monitor its progress to evaluate cost-effectiveness, employee participation and environmental impact.

Provide Feedback to your Employees: Share the success, progress and problems with your company's program periodically with employees. Here's how:

- Use memos, newsletters or company emails to distribute updates or milestones about the program;
- Inform staff of certain contaminants
- Inform staff of individuals/departments with strong participation
- Publicize the quantity your company recycles and revenues over a certain period (month, quarter, year)
- Calculate/distribute disposal cost savings based on the decrease of office waste
- Survey employees/departments to identify program problems and improvements
- Post informative articles on recycling source reduction, reuse and/or the environment to further educate staff
- Include information on recycling program participation in the new employee orientation and/or handbook
- Show how successful and creative your program is by promotion your company's efforts outside the business
- Consider applying for various local, state or federal awards
- Become an EPA WasteWise business to further improve your program
- Get involved in local, state or national recycling and environmental or industry-related organizations
- Distribute press releases on your program to local newspapers

7. **Promote your Program through Education:** Staff education is crucial to the success of your recycling program. Here are some tips:

- Education should start before your recycling program, so employees know what to recycle.
- Introduce your staff and custodial staff to the program in writing, such as an introductory memo, and at a staff or company meeting.
- If you are using a recycling pickup service provider, ask about employee education and training.

- Explain how recyclables are collected, what is recyclable, how the program will benefit the environment and the company, as well as other waste reduction and reuse measures that will be implemented.
- Show samples of recyclables and non-recyclable materials (contamination) on a board or sign near recycling containers.

Recycling Signage: Create your own container and recycling signs:

- Recycle Cardboard
- Recycle Glass
- Recycle Inkjet Cartridges
- Recycle Paper
- Recycle Plastic
- Recycle Toner Cartridges
- Do NOT Recycle Contaminants

8. **The Role of the Custodial Staff:** Custodial staff needs to be aware of the program. It is not necessary to use janitorial staff to collect recyclables, but they do need to be aware of the program to prevent unintentional contamination. Review these questions if you are thinking of using custodians as part of your recycling program:

- Will custodians empty recycling containers, and will you be charged extra for emptying these containers?
- Can the recycling pickups be incorporated into the existing or a future service contract?
- How often will they empty containers? Nightly? Every other night? Once a week?

Source: Charlestown Township, Earth 911, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency