

Waste Prevention

This tip sheet corresponds with Green Star Award Standard # 3 – Reduce Solid Waste Disposal. Another useful tool is Chapter 4 in “Becoming a Green Star: A Waste Prevention Guide for Anchorage Businesses.” You can find the guide online in pdf and html format at www.greenstarinc.org/guideindex.php or request a hard copy from Green Star.

What is Waste Prevention?

Waste prevention comes in many forms, and examples can vary greatly based on the type of business or organization involved. Generally, **waste prevention is any activity that eliminates waste before it is generated.** It also is referred to as source reduction or pollution prevention.

Many environmentally preferable purchasing activities qualify as waste prevention (see Tip Sheets #1, #21, #22). Waste prevention encompasses not only purchasing but use behaviors. Recycling is not waste prevention, as the waste is already generated, but may be considered a waste *reduction* activity.

This tip sheet offers waste prevention ideas primarily for offices. Later tip sheets will address specific business sector waste prevention initiatives.

Visit www.greenstarinc.org/tipsheets.php for additional tip sheets.

The Facts About Paper

Typical business offices generate about 1.5 lbs. of waste paper per employee each day.

Paper makes up 40-50% of our entire municipal solid waste stream.

High-grade printing, copying and writing paper is the largest single component in a landfill, contributing greatly to the amount of methane generated and released from landfills.

More than three-quarters of paper waste generated in offices is recyclable.

Office Paper

Most businesses have offices of some kind. Paper is the largest waste stream in offices so reducing paper use can reduce trash costs and purchasing costs. Recycling paper is just one way to manage paper waste. Not purchasing paper is more efficient.

Go electronic. Resist the urge to print documents and emails but store them electronically where you can access them when necessary. Jot down information on scrap paper if there's only a name or phone number you need.

Use it again. Paper that has only been used on one side has all sorts of uses. Collect one-sided paper in a separate paper tray by your printer and copier. Put it in the fax machine to receive faxes, make scratch pads or notebooks out of it. Cut it up for phone messages.

Just don't do it. Write meeting agendas on a whiteboard rather than printing copies for everyone attending the meeting. Email a copy to anyone who needs to know ahead of time and request that they don't print it out.

Double side it. Develop a policy to copy reports, letters, and memos on both sides. Duplexing copy and print jobs can reduce paper use by 30% (this takes into consideration documents that are only one page or odd-numbered pages).

Reduce incoming paper. Identify mail that is unwanted or still being delivered to employees no longer with the company. Contact senders and get off lists to reduce the amount of paper you must manage and the amount of time necessary to sort and deliver mail within the office.

Just one please. If you can't go electronic, develop a central filing system to reduce paper use and save space. Pass around memos with routing slips or post one in a central location rather than making copies for everyone.

Reformat. Could you eliminate indents, change margins, and decrease other white space in your documents? For large documents or ones that require many copies, this exercise can reduce paper use significantly. Some government agencies actually require that reports be produced without the excessive indents often seen in outline formats.

Shrink it. Printing 2-up or 4-up (multiple reduced-size pages on one sheet) for drafts or filing will reduce paper use.

Reduce

Start your efforts by identifying areas where you may be able to eliminate a waste altogether. If not possible, reduce the amount generated. Here are some examples:

- If your restrooms have individual (C-fold) towels, consider replacing them with roll towels or air dryers to reduce paper use. Studies show that people use less towel when using roll style systems. Better yet, install air dryers to eliminate paper towel use.
- Use rechargeable batteries. Set up a recharging station to rotate batteries through equipment, always having charged batteries on hand.
- Create printer settings on your computer to reduce ink use for drafts. If you have a color printer, you can opt to print in black and white to conserve colored ink. Even if your document appears to be black and white, color inks are often used if set for color and color ink is expensive! EcoFont is a specific font package designed with tiny holes in each letter to reduce ink use by as much as 25%.

Reuse

Using reusable items ensures that products don't end up in the landfill anytime soon.

- Stock workplace kitchens and break rooms with reusable items, such as plates, bowls, cups, mugs, and flatware. For events, consider getting a few larger reusable serving bowls and trays as well. These all can be obtained easily at Salvation Army stores or from employees' homes. Everyone always has more coffee cups than they can use. Institute a system of cleaning dishes. Install a dishwasher if possible. Consider including dishwashing duties in your cleaning contract if it is too difficult to get staff to clean up after themselves.
- Designate an area where reusable but unwanted office supplies and equipment can be stored. Encourage staff to check this area before using or ordering new items. The best place for used supplies is with the new supplies so employees don't have to look in two different areas.

- Reuse shipping pallets or identify someone who will.
- Reuse packing and shipping materials such as cardboard boxes, bubble wrap and packing peanuts for outgoing shipments. Donate any excess material to local packaging stores.
- Reuse mailing envelopes. Just place a new label over the old address. Cross out old postage or flip envelope over.
- Ask custodial staff to only replace trash can liners in offices if they are soiled.
- Institute a system of reusable shipping totes if you do a lot of closed-loop shipping. This reduces cardboard waste significantly.
- Install white boards (dry erase boards) in conference areas and common areas. This can reduce the use of paper flipcharts, flyers, and paper calendars. Large conference room "smart" boards can be purchased that will print your notes on smaller paper or even send the data on the board to your computer.
- Post commercial or industrial items that you can no longer use on the Alaska Materials Exchange on Green Star's web site at www.greenstarinc.org.



Shining Stars

Corporate Express sends out supplies to customers in reusable cardboard boxes that can be easily flattened. The company asks that the boxes be returned to its drivers on their next delivery and the boxes are printed with information about reusing them.

City Hall's reproduction shop makes small notepads in different sizes using scrap paper generated through other print jobs. The notepads are available to all City Hall employees.



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