

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Proper implementation of recycling initiatives can help save the planet, as well as recoup budget dollars

By Becky Mollenkamp

This article originally ran in Housekeeping Solutions magazine in July 2008. Visit www.CleanLink.com for additional articles.

The decision to start a recycling program is typically a principled one — reducing the amount of waste shipped to a landfill is one way businesses can help save the planet. Done well, however, recycling is not just ethical, but also practical and profitable. And many facility managers may be surprised to learn it can be relatively inexpensive and painless to implement.

The Silver Dollar City theme park near Branson, Mo., started its recycling program in 1991 with a relatively small investment of \$15,000. The park's trash disposal fees immediately decreased 50 percent, saving \$650 a week. Even better, revenue generated from the program has been used for community service programs, including building a lifeline helicopter pad, constructing a house for Habitat for Humanity, and purchasing food, toys and clothing for area children in need.

In just the last two years, the recycling program at Intel Corporation's Rio Rancho, N.M., location has saved the site more than \$2 million — and diverted more than 5,000 tons of material from going into landfills. At Parkway School District in St. Louis, Mo., recycling generates more than \$80,000 in revenue and saves at least 1,700 tons of material from landfills each year. Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond recycles about 25 percent of its waste each year.

"Our goal is to capture the material and get compensated for it instead of placing it in the trash, which costs us money," says Steven Heinitz, VCU's recycling coordinator. "We don't make a tremendous amount of money but we actually make a little money doing the right thing, versus landfilling it all."

Such success stories are not rare, yet many organizations remain reluctant to recycle. Department executives may feel overwhelmed by what they perceive to be a cumbersome project. Or perhaps they assume they cannot afford a program. But recycling experts agree that any business can find the time and money needed to recycle if they follow five key steps.

Start Small

Start a program by deciding what to recycle. This decision depends on how much space is available to sort and store items and what types of materials the business uses. More often than not, it's wise to start with just one item, such as paper or plastic, and then slowly add other materials as time goes on.

Parkway School District's program began in 1990 to recycle polystyrene. Over the years, it has grown to include paper, plastic, aluminum cans, cardboard, steel and other metals, construction materials, electronics and yard waste.

Conversely, VCU embarked on a fairly comprehensive program from the start in 1997 and found facility management's image suffered when it wasn't fully prepared to handle the workload.

"You're better off starting off small and doing it right than trying to service everyone in one shot," Heinitz says. "Set the bar high but not unachievable. Make sure everyone is clear on the expectations so you don't start it and have to back up because you didn't think it through."

It's important to spend a lot of time researching and planning before implementing a recycling program. Research what has worked and failed at similar facilities. Learn about all aspects of recycling from collection and handling to transportation and brokering. Then work with each department in the facility to tailor the program to meet their individual needs.

Keeping the program manageable from the beginning helps get maintenance staff on board; if they feel overloaded with new work, they'll resent the program. A small and sensible program also helps to secure buy-in from upper management, who are always motivated by dollars and cents.

"The cornerstone to a successful recycling program is first and foremost to have support in place at all levels," says Gary Enzor, recycling/solid waste management coordinator at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, which started its recycling program in 1991 after a state mandate.

Seek Out Help

When many recycling programs began in the 1990s, the only logistical option was to create a MRF (materials recovery facility), which is an area where maintenance or housekeeping staff take recyclables and then sort and process the materials themselves. This is a labor-intensive process that requires a big commitment of space, equipment and employee time.

Today, single-stream recovery programs are an appealing option. They involve working with the area waste hauler (or a private company), which places a container on site where all recoverable materials are placed. The hauler then picks up the container and does the sorting and processing work. The fees for this service are often comparable to the fees of operating a MRF.

"Past attempts to initiate some sort of facility-wide or corporate-wide recycling failed because they were too costly, inconvenient or required extra staff to implement," says Erin Kennedy, senior communications specialist at Community Medical Centers in Fresno, Calif. "Fortunately, we live in a

community where there are outside contractors who have expertise and contacts with disposal facilities to make putting in a recycling program easy and feasible.”

After years of watching employees take home recyclables for curbside collection, Community Medical Centers’ management this year contracted with a service provider to begin a recycling program. The company that picks up the hospitals’ shredded paper agreed to recycle other materials at no extra cost. The contractor modified its existing paper bins to also collect cans, plastic and glass.

Existing vendors can also provide helpful suggestions on improving a recycling program. For example, Intel learned from its paper manufacturer that a paper baler was well worth the investment.

“In working with them, we came to understand that if we baled the material, we not only got a higher price for the material, but they would coordinate pick-ups and absorb transportation costs,” says Orlando Paul Gallegos, property and building manager. “Within six months, we were able to recoup the cost of the purchase of two simple vertical balers.”

It’s also helpful to look beyond the facility for help with funding. There are many competitive government grants that provide money for equipment and other costs. For example, solid waste districts (find them through state departments of natural resources) often offer money to help businesses start recycling programs. Beyond grants, ask city and county representatives what support, financial or otherwise, they can provide. Or consider partnering with another business or school to combine resources.

Finally, join a local, state, or national recycling association for invaluable educational and networking opportunities.

Make It Easy To Do

A recycling program can only be successful if people participate, so it must be efficient for both building occupants and maintenance staff.

Bins should be clearly marked and strategically scattered throughout the building and outside so occupants don’t have to walk far to find one (recycling is threatened when waste receptacles are the easier option). To encourage recycling of plastic, its biggest waste item, Intel floods public spaces with collection bins and limits the numbers of waste receptacles in those areas.

Use high-quality, durable plastic bins. These containers require a bigger upfront investment, but they pay off over the long haul.

Likewise, invest in equipment that will make the recycling program easier for those charged with implementing it. To make its MRF more efficient, Parkway School District bought two trucks, a fork lift, two compactors, a cable stripper, a jaws of life, a chop saw and other disassembling tools.

Reducing the staff’s workload is important, but be cautious about how programs are implemented. Many facilities, including the University of Arkansas, require building occupants to cart their personal recycling, such as the contents of desk-side paper bins, to a central collection area. While this saves cleaning staff from having to do this chore, it discourages compliance.

“Our plan was to get our customers to take some ownership in the recycling effort by asking them to empty their own recycling boxes,” says Enzor. “But we’re making it more convenient to throw away material than to recycle it.”

Promote The Program

Placing a bunch of bins around a building isn’t enough to make a recycling program successful. Marketing is incredibly important and it can begin at program conception by involving employees in the planning process. Create a team that includes representatives from all parts of the company to plan logistics, write procedures and educate their peers.

“The team was crucial in problem solving,” says Sue Noel, environmental project coordinator for Silver Dollar City. “I could determine which division was not following procedure and contact the team member in charge who then addressed the problem. It helped build program support between divisions and shared the responsibility of waste diversion.”

Many organizations get creative with recycling promotions. Furman University in Greenville, S.C., hosts “Furman Gets Trashed,” which included collecting dormitory trash and having the students sort through it on the library steps. At Intel, revenue generated from recycling was used to outfit an employee fitness center and create an outdoor running trail.

“It is a constant challenge to keep the program in the forefront,” says Bill Guinther, Parkway School District’s resource conservation manager. “It is a struggle at times, particularly when unfounded reports are published negating the need or importance of materials recovery.”

Continue To Grow

It is always possible to improve upon a recycling program. There are so many options for “going green” in waste management that it can take years or decades to implement them all — and by then something new will have come along.

If only recycle paper and plastic are recycled, grow to include metals. If items are only collected indoors, add collection points outside. If programs already include all of the typical materials, get creative with newer options. Parkway School District, for example, saves \$35,000 a year by turning yard waste into mulch.

To make its program more comprehensive, Furman University is hiring a director of sustainability to keep abreast of current recycling trends and to suggest ways to make the program more efficient. It’s a tall order considering that the school is already so far ahead of the curve.

In addition to recycling all of the usual suspects (including a 90 percent rate on construction materials), the school is doing gray-water recovery at its newest building. Its eco-cottage program — where students live in energy-efficient homes and track their waste consumption — is such a hit, the school is in the process of converting several more homes. Next, Furman will add composting to its recycling program.

“We’re a small college but we are at about a 35 percent recycling rate,” says Phil Lewis, Furman’s manager of custodial operations and special events. “Some people are still reluctant to recycle so it is always good to have more opportunities available. I think we’re doing a good job.”

►**Department News:**
OnSite wants your feedback.

please contact Melissa Coats at OnSite, 1-800-580-8272 ext. 2024 or at melissa.coats@tasb.org.

◆ In the next few weeks the TASB Planning and Research Department will be e-mailing out an OnSite Services customer satisfaction survey. Please take the time to fill this out. Your opinions and input are extremely important to us as we strive to offer the services and expertise that your district needs.

As always please feel free to share our newsletter with others within your district or other districts that are not members of the OnSite group. If you have any questions, please call us at 1-800-580-8272 ext. 4154 or e-mail us at onsite@tasb.org.

◆ Would you or your district be interested in assistance from OnSite in utility bill auditing, tracking, and reporting? If so

Upcoming OnSite Training Opportunities

October	Edinburg CISD (Region 1)		
October 14	Asbestos Designated Person	8 hours	8 a.m.-5 p.m.
October 15	IPM Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
October 16	IAQ Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
October	Austin TX (TASB Campus)		
October 28-29	16 Hour Asbestos O&M Contractor Class	16 hours	8 a.m.- 5 p.m.
November	Rio Brazos Co-Op (Region 12)		
November 11	Asbestos Designated Person	8 hours	8 a.m.- 5 p.m.
November 12	IPM Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
November 13	IAQ Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
December	Austin TX (TASB Campus)		
December 16	Grounds Management	7 hours	8 a.m.- 4 p.m.
December 17	Hazardous Materials Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
December 18	IAQ Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
January 2009	Austin TX (TASB Campus)		
January 13	Asbestos Designated Person	8 hours	8 a.m.- 5 p.m.
January 14	IPM Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
January 15	Environmental/Facilities Regulatory Compliance	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
February	Splendora ISD (Region 6)		
February 3	Asbestos Designated Person	8 hours	8 a.m.- 5 p.m.
February 4	IPM Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.
February 5	IAQ Coordinator	6 hours	8 a.m.- 3 p.m.

Fees: OnSite Members FREE

Non-members:

Asbestos Designated Person	\$425
IPM Coordinator	\$425
IAQ Coordinator	\$425
Grounds Management	\$425
Environmental/Facilities	\$325
HAZCOM Coordinator	\$325

Contact OnSite:

Office: 1-800-580-8272

Fax: 1-512-467-0264

E-mail: onsite@tasb.org

Web: www.onsite.tasb.org

Please check the web-site for additional information

