

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



WasteWise Tip Sheet

Waste Prevention

WASTE
WISE



WasteWise Program Elements

- *Waste Prevention*
- *Recycling Collection*
- *Buying or Manufacturing Recycled Products*

What Is Waste Prevention?

Waste prevention (also known as source reduction) is the design, purchase, manufacture, or use of products and materials to reduce the amount or toxicity of solid waste generated. Waste prevention is **not** recycling, although these two solid waste management strategies are often confused with each other. Recycling is an effective way to **manage** waste materials once they have been generated; waste prevention actually **reduces the amount of material** used and therefore the amount discarded.

What Are the Benefits of Waste Prevention?

Waste prevention often results in substantial savings through reduced purchasing costs and more efficient practices. It also can reduce waste disposal costs. In addition, waste prevention has environmental benefits, including reduced energy consumption and pollution, conservation of natural resources, and extension of valuable landfill capacity. Practicing waste prevention can improve customer relations by demonstrating a company's concern about the environment. It can also enhance employee relations by involving employees in the company's waste reduction program.

How Does Waste Prevention Fit into the WasteWise Program?

The purpose of WasteWise is to spur substantial progress in reducing municipal solid waste by working with businesses to identify and implement innovative and cost-saving waste reduction programs. Each WasteWise participant commits to implementing three significant waste prevention activities of their choice, monitoring progress, and reporting annually on the estimated amount of waste avoided. Waste prevention is a critical component of the WasteWise program and is the component that most often provides substantial cost savings. Other elements of WasteWise include committing to expanding or improving programs to collect recyclables and to increasing the recycled content in purchased or manufactured products.



Recycled/Recyclable

Printed on paper that contains at least 50% recycled fiber.

What Are Some Examples of Waste Prevention?

Waste prevention includes a wide variety of activities to reduce the amount of waste generated. Some examples include:

- **Using or manufacturing minimal or reusable packaging.** Work with suppliers to minimize the amount of packaging used and to return shipping materials such as crates, cartons, and pallets for reuse. To reduce waste in your shipping department, you can reuse packing material, use less packaging, and ship merchandise in returnable/reusable containers. In restaurants and cafeterias, using bulk food and beverage dispensers instead of individual serving containers cuts down on waste.
- **Using and maintaining durable equipment and supplies.** High quality, long-lasting supplies and equipment that can be repaired easily mean fewer discards. These items will stay out of the waste stream longer. In addition, the higher initial costs are often justified by lower maintenance and disposal costs. Since these items are replaced less frequently, further cost savings can be realized. Renting or leasing needed equipment might be another option.
- **Reusing products and supplies.** Using durable, reusable products rather than single-use materials is one of the most effective waste prevention strategies. A one-time investment for reusable items ends the frequently expensive cycle of discarding and reordering. Consider adopting simple, cost-effective measures such as washing and reusing ceramic mugs in place of disposable cups. Encourage employees to reuse common items such as file folders and interoffice envelopes.
- **Using supplies and materials more efficiently.** Changing company policies and operations to increase efficiency, reduce waste, and conserve materials is an important way to achieve waste prevention. For example, switching to double-sided photocopying can cut paper costs by 10 to 40 percent.
- **Exchanging, selling, or giving away unneeded goods for reuse.** Donate excess food, used furniture, and other materials to local organizations such as homeless shelters or charities. Check to see if a local materials exchange exists that can accept and distribute these items to non-profit groups. A growing number of companies are also successfully selling or exchanging unneeded materials directly with other companies that can use them in their manufacturing processes.
- **Reducing the use of hazardous constituents.** Find out which products in your graphics and maintenance departments (such as ink, solvent, paint, glue, and other materials) are available with fewer or no hazardous constituents. Ask your suppliers about water-based (rather than oil- or solvent-based) products.

Reducing paper usage and reducing packaging/shipping materials are two waste prevention opportunities that most companies can implement easily and effectively:

Reducing Paper Use

- Use both sides of the page. Draft reports can be printed on the back of paper that has been used once. Set aside such paper for printers and copy machines.

What Are Some Examples of Waste Prevention Opportunities Available to Most Companies?

- Make double-sided photocopies. Reports can be copied on both sides of the page.
- Print only the number of copies necessary. Limit the distribution of correspondence and reports to only those who really need “hard copies.”
- Route one hard copy to several readers.
- Use electronic mail or bulletin boards for sending and receiving information.

Reducing Packaging/Shipping Materials

- Eliminate unnecessary layers of packaging.
- Ask suppliers to take back pallets or switch to more durable pallets that can be reused.
- Investigate other reusable packaging, such as boxes.
- Reuse received boxes and packaging for outgoing shipments.
- Shred or crumple waste paper for use as packing material.

What Additional Information on Waste Prevention Is Available From EPA?

To order the following EPA documents, call the EPA RCRA/Superfund Hotline at 800 424-9346 or TDD 800 553-7672 for the hearing impaired. For Washington, DC, and outside the United States, call 703 412-9810 or TDD 703 412-3323.

Business Guide for Reducing Solid Waste (EPA530-K-92-004). This is a comprehensive how-to guide on assessing your facility's solid waste and choosing cost-effective waste reduction actions.

Waste Prevention Pays Off (EPA530-K-92-005). This collection of brief case studies describes how companies have cut costs substantially through a variety of waste prevention actions.

Sources of Additional Information

Coalition of Northeastern Governors Source Reduction Task Force (CONEG), 202 624-8450. CONEG provides information and a challenge program on reducing packaging waste.

Think Green: A Retailer's Environmental Idea Book, 1992. \$15.00 for retailers, \$25.00 for non-retailers. This 40-page guide presents retailers with ideas on waste prevention actions for every area of their stores. It also provides detailed, “how to” instructions on implementing these waste prevention activities.

Illinois Retail Merchants Association
36 S. Wabash Avenue, Suite 1226
Chicago, IL 60603
312 726-4600

Institute of Packaging Professionals, 800 432-4085. This group offers a variety of publications on waste prevention and packaging design for the environment. Call for a free copy of their catalogue of publications.

Source Reduction Now by Minnesota's Office of Waste Management. For a copy, call the WasteWise Hotline at 800 372-9473. This 120-page manual provides information on how to implement a waste prevention program in any organization. It identifies actions that reduce waste at the source and gives information on how to measure product and behavior changes that prevent waste. This manual includes case studies and sample graphics and complements a training video.

***Business Guide to Waste Reduction and Recycling*, 1992. \$25.00.** This 110-page guide comprehensively describes all the steps involved in implementing workplace waste reduction programs, including forming waste reduction teams, performing waste audits, implementing waste prevention, contracting vendors, and launching recycling programs. The guide includes numerous resources, such as waste conversion charts, recordkeeping forms, and key contacts in North America.

Xerox Document and Software Service
Xerox Corporation
701 South Aviation Boulevard
El Segundo, CA 90245-9935
800 445-5554

***Reducing Office Paper Waste* by Robert Graff and Bette Fishbein, 1991. \$18.00.** This 28-page booklet describes the role of the individual office in national paper production and disposal. It also provides conversion tables, technology reviews, and other sources designed to help companies implement office paper reduction programs.

Inform, Inc.
381 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016-8806
212 689-4040



WasteWise is a partnership between EPA and America's leading businesses. Participants set their own waste prevention, recycling, and recycled-product purchasing goals. WasteWise supports company efforts through technical assistance and recognition of participants' successes.

For more information about any aspect of WasteWise, call 800 EPAWISE (800 372-9473).