

Restaurant Waste Reduction

Waste reduction is one of the most effective low cost or no cost ways to reduce disposal fees, and green a commercial kitchen. Most waste reduction practices are just simple good business practices with the "green" designation being an added bonus.

Most foodservice operations throw out a massive amount of garbage, most of which could be diverted. 75% of material in today's landfill is recyclable or compostable, while 50-70% of the weight of a foodservice operation's garbage consists of compostable food items. Food packaging makes up most of the remaining weight of the garbage's bins, but account for around 70% of the volume of foodservice trash. A foodservice operation without recycling, composting or any waste reduction program can reduce their disposal cost by at least half by implementing simple, structured practices. Rethink. Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.



Rethink

In the waste management vernacular, Rethink encourages individuals and businesses to consider the way they use goods. Rethinking your waste production is not only the action of reducing the amount of waste a business produces, but a complete redesign of the way one uses goods, if it uses them at all. Rethinking waste involves looking at each and every product and person that passes through the doors or sits in a facility, then changing the way they eat, work, supply or purchase natural resources. For a school foodservice operation, this may be going to a trayless cafeteria, which is a new movement that has grown across college campuses. Removing the trays so students do not take too much food has reduced campus dining facility's food waste by around 35%, saved millions of gallons of water and chemicals and cut labor costs from the reduction of dirty dishes. Rethinking the way a kitchen operates takes innovation and the will to embrace change. The results are invaluable.

Reduce

The first step in reducing the amount of waste a restaurant produces is to conduct a waste audit. Waste audits allow you to physically see what waste is being produced in your facility. It is a somewhat unpleasant experience, but a very valuable tool in reducing waste. A waste audit "how to" is provided here.

Once you have completed a waste audit, consider your current practices and how they are affecting your garbage. What is being thrown in the trash? Is it recyclable or compostable? Was it incorrectly dated and went bad? Burnt? Over portioned? What are you doing right? What are you doing wrong? Is your training of staff or the layout of the facility and recycling/compost/trash bins affecting what materials wind up in the trash? Recycling should be an easier task than throwing something away. Are there enough recycling bins? Every garbage can should be accompanied by a recycling and or compost bin and can often be smaller than the recycling bins. In areas like offices, there may not even be a need for a trash bin. The large majority of waste from an office consists of recyclable paper.

Training is an essential part of a successful waste reduction program. Recycling does not come naturally for many people and may even have cultural hurdles. Integrate waste reduction into all training programs and materials, and provide detailed intuitive materials to all staff in all needed languages. Pictorial recycling guides are a very helpful document to laminate and hang above all recycling areas. After you have changed and improved your current practices, implement new programs. This could be composting, on-site worm bins, recycling of additional products or replacing plastic disposable goods with durable or compostable options. When implementing new programs, start slowly with one program and be ready and willing to make changes in your daily operations or how you implement the program. All operations are different and thus have different needs. One program may work fine at a particular restaurant, but need tweaking for another operation. Go slow and keep resolute. Find more info on composting and food waste options by clicking here.



Precycling

The best way to reduce waste is to not produce it in the first place. This is often called precycling or source reduction. Source reduction includes choosing products that come with less or no packaging like beer kegs versus bottles, bulk items and vendors that reuse their packaging. Precycling also implies choosing products that are packaged in more recyclable material such as items packed in cardboard rather than unrecyclable plastic, or products shipped in reusable containers.

REUSE

The first and most important reuse option in foodservice is food donation. Thousands of organizations across the country are eager to accept all sorts of donations including old wares and equipment. The

donations go to a great cause, and are tax deductible to boot. Read more on the Food Donation page. Equipment repair is an option that is beneficial in many situations, but not always the best choice. Old equipment may have a little life left in it, but new equipment is often more efficient. Energy Star rated equipment often save enough energy that buying new is usually the best option. The Tools link provides several lifecycle calculators that compare the savings of new energy efficient equipment versus old, standard units. Routinely maintaining equipment is also very important so that you are not forced to choice whether or not to buy new equipment.

RECYCLING

Recycling, unfortunately, tends to receive the lion's share of the general public's attention when it comes to waste reduction. While it is a very important step, reducing the amount of recyclables used in the first place is a far more important step.

Recycling varies across the country as to what is collected and how it is collected so contact your county waste management or waste hauler on details for recycling in your area. They should be able to direct you to drop-off sites that collect materials that are not collected through curbside recycling. Earth911.com also provides a list of collection sites around the country and items they collect. Many items can be recycled besides the standard paper, metal, plastic and glass. Plastic wrap used to protect linens and disposable items can be recycled at some facilities or anywhere that accepts grocery bags. Shipping companies will take your Styrofoam peanuts and schools may take your bottle caps for art projects, be creative and willing to make a few calls. Other recyclable items include corks, candle wax, wood, construction debris and old or broken utensils and kitchen ware made from at least 75% metal.

At a minimum, all foodservice operations should recycle fryer oil and materials that are toxic such as fluorescent lights, old thermostats, batteries, unused chemicals, paints and miscellaneous hazardous materials. Again, contact your local waste management department or earth911.com for information on hazardous material collection. Many municipalities have also implemented electronic recycling programs along with national programs from a variety of electronics companies.

BUYING RECYCLED

The final step in waste reduction and recycling is to 'close the loop' by purchasing products made with recycled content. Most foodservice paper products, office goods and many building materials have recycled content options. Recycled products require less energy and produce less greenhouse gases when they are re-manufactured into new goods as compared to virgin material. Recycled goods also add value to the products you recycle. Demand for recycled products creates a demand for recyclable material, which in turn opens up the potential for greater recycled products creates a demand for recyclable material, which in turn opens up the potential for greater recycling in a wider area of the country.

Set purchasing policies for buying goods with recycled content such as napkins, paper towels and all other food related paper goods must contain 35% post-consumer recycled material AND office goods made with 100% post-consumer material. Written policies will help ensure that these products are used in an organization regardless of who is doing the purchasing

Source: SustainableFoodservice.com

Page 2 of 2

