

# Recycling: It starts with you.

A Guide to Recycling at Work



## Why Recycle? It Makes a Difference

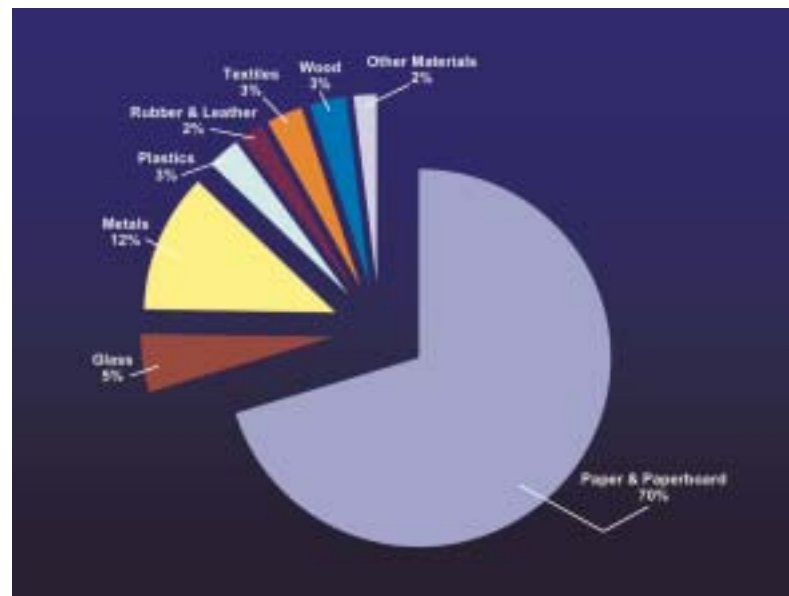
Recycling has a big impact on businesses, the environment, and you.

### Consider these facts:

- Recycling is good corporate citizenship.
- Implementing effective environmental practices, such as recycling, can have economic rewards. And, customers notice. Workplace recycling also helps communities meet recycling goals.
- Recyclables have monetary value.
- Recyclables are the raw materials for new products. Recovered paper supplies more than 37 percent of the raw material used to make new paper products. More than 48 percent of office papers were recovered for recycling in 2003, and turned into products like cereal boxes, tissue, and more printing and writing papers.
- Every ton of paper recycled saves 3.3 cubic yards of landfill space. Currently more paper is recovered for recycling than landfilled.
- Of all discarded products in an average office, about 62 percent is recyclable paper, 9 percent is corrugated packaging, and 29 percent are other materials.
- A typical business generates about 1.7 pounds of material per employee per day, much of it recyclable, high-grade paper.

### What Gets Recycled?

Americans recycled 30 percent of materials and products from the municipal solid waste stream in 2001, diverting 51 million tons of paper to recycling. Here's what was recovered according to the U.S. EPA:



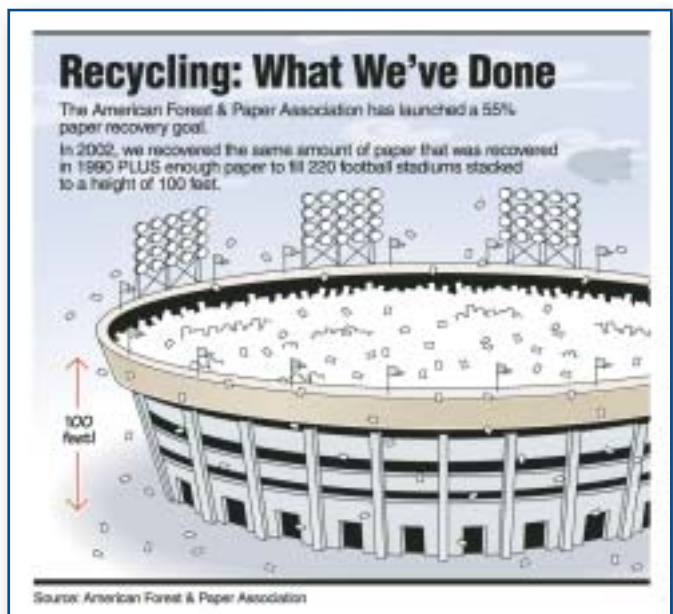
# A Guide to Recycling at Work

Americans have been recycling paper for more than 300 years. What started out small has grown to extraordinary proportions. Today Americans recycle half of all the paper they consume, and that recovered paper goes back into new products we use everyday – like newspapers, corrugated containers, grocery sacks, cereal boxes, and office paper. To build on this success, the U.S. paper industry has set a goal to recover 55 percent of all paper consumed in the U.S. by 2012.

Much of today's discarded material, especially paper, comes from businesses. Commercial sources like office buildings, schools, and institutions, make up about 35 to 45 percent of all municipal solid waste, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). And, about 93 percent of all office waste by weight is paper. Most of this could be recycled.

In workplaces across America 4.4 million tons of office papers were recovered in 2003, up from 3.3 million tons in 1995. Still, less than half

of all office papers are recycled. To boost the amount of recycled materials available for new products, more office papers and other paper products need to be recycled. **Get your company on board!**



# Steps to Workplace Recycling

## 1. Gather the Facts

### Assess the discards

Conduct an audit to determine the amount and types of materials that are recoverable or recyclable. For most offices this will mean a variety of papers. An audit also provides information about where most of the recyclables are generated in the company. Records from the local recycler may be helpful to understand any material fluctuations or cycles.

### Target materials for recycling

Identify all materials that are potentially recyclable (see typical office recyclables chart). Evaluate how much could be recycled, and how recyclables might best be separated for collection. Target those materials that are most abundant in the recycling stream and would be the easiest to separate for recovery.

### Talk to your recycler

Your recycling company can provide information about the types of materials they accept for recycling. Work with them to determine how recycling specific materials might impact your current hauling contract, services and costs.

If your company is a tenant in a large office building, the building owners or management company may contract with the recycler. If the recycler is not able to accept the materials you want to recycle, contact a local recycling center. Smaller companies may also want to consider drop-off recycling.

### Specific issues to discuss with your recycler

- What are the potential costs and benefits of recycling?
- Will a decrease in the amount of material going to disposal help cover the costs of recycling?
- Which materials can be recycled most cost effectively?
- What grades of paper are handled and what is the minimum amount required for pickup?
- How will material need to be collected? What are the common contaminants for each material? Will we be notified if material is not accepted because of contamination?
- Will we receive updates on the quality and quantity of materials collected?
- Will additional containers or other equipment be required for the collection of recyclables?

### Typical Office Recyclables

- Office papers (e.g., copy paper, letterhead, notebook paper, envelopes, file folders)
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Shipping (corrugated) boxes
- Paperboard packaging
- Glass, plastic, and aluminum beverage containers
- Electronics (e.g., computers and cell phones)
- Printer cartridges
- Packing materials (e.g., "peanuts" and bubble wrap)

## 2. Design a Program

### Get management support

Gain the support of your company's top management for a recycling program. Before going to management, arm yourself with information and data that shows program value or identifies a need to improve an existing recycling program.

- Target the appropriate decision maker. Who can make the program happen?
- Focus on costs, impact on productivity, staffing, environmental benefits, and positive public relations.
- Request that one individual be assigned responsibility for the program.
- Get the support of other leaders in the company to help champion recycling.

### Organize collection procedures

To improve participation and the quality of recyclable materials collected, create a convenient and efficient method for collecting recyclables. When designing collection procedures or attempting to improve the current recycling program, consider:

- **Containers** – Determine the size and number of containers needed to implement the program. Two containers at each desk—one for recycling and one for trash—is optimal. Use color to help identify what goes in a bin. Designate different bins for different commodities to help prevent contamination of recyclables.
- **Collection locations** – Have at least one common area collection container for every 15-20 employees. As space permits, put containers in common areas near copiers, in mail rooms, and at printer locations. Be sure to consider fire codes that may affect storing paper.
- **Signage** – Post signs on bins and above collection containers indicating what materials are acceptable and what should be kept out. Use pictures or other visuals when possible.
- **Employee participation** – Collection procedures should be as simple as possible to improve employee participation and to allow for the most effective separation of recyclables.
- **Custodial staff** – Determine who will be responsible for moving recyclables from offices to collection locations and eventually to large recycling containers. In most cases custodial staff will be responsible for some or all of this process. Staff and custodial teams will need to be trained in these new processes.

### Keep It Clean

To ensure office paper is able to be recycled, keep contaminants out during collection. Common contaminants include:

- Food and items covered with food, such as cups, plates and wrappers
- Tapes, glues, and adhesive labels
- Medical or hazardous waste
- Specialty papers, like photographs, blueprints, and foil decals
- Deeply dyed papers (dark and neon)
- Tyvek envelopes, computer disks, slides, transparencies, rubber bands, and metal fasteners
- Glass, aluminum, and plastic packaging

## Start It Up

For small organizations, it may be possible to start the recycling program all at once. For larger companies, begin with a short pilot, or test the program in one department or floor. This will help iron out any problems before full implementation.

- **Pilot test** the recycling program in a small area or division of the company. Check collection procedures, answer questions about what's accepted in the program, and monitor custodial staff. Resolve problems ahead of time to streamline the process before expanding to the entire company.
- **Phase-in** the program one department or floor at a time. If your organization is large, begin with a floor a week or each month to ease into the program. This is also an opportunity to monitor employee response and gauge the amount of recyclables collected.
- **Plan a kick-off event.** When you're ready to begin the program, start with a bang. Be sure to include management in the event. To make certain all employees understand the program, use a variety of communications tools to get the message out.

## 3. Engage and Coach Employees

Employees make a recycling program happen. They are a recycling program's most valuable asset. Educate employees, talk up the recycling program, and get the word out. Communicate positively, clearly, and often. Consider these tips:

- **Use “recycling champions”** – Identify employees that are enthusiastic about the program and let them help you sell it to the other employees.
- **Set up recycling teams** – Form teams among departments, floors, or company divisions. Organize competitions to determine which team is recycling the most. This will help spread the word about the program and generate enthusiasm.
- **Include information in employee orientation materials** – Incorporate the company recycling guidelines into new employee orientation materials and presentations.
- **Use a variety of communications tools**
  - Email recycling tips and reminders
  - Post or distribute flyers
  - Organize company-wide or division recycling education seminars
  - Post signage in and around employee common areas
  - Include recycling information in the company website, newsletter, or other internal communication
  - Arrange a “bag lunch” presentation and invite the recycling company
- **Create incentives** – Motivate employees with contests and rewards for achieving recycling goals.
- **Monitor recycling bins regularly** – Inspect bins, create a system to remind employees about contamination, and praise employees for a job well done.
- **Repeat** – Circulate communications frequently about the recycling program and help reinforce employee recycling behaviors.

## 4. Measure and Share Results

Track results to show the merits of recycling and motivate employees. When management and employees see progress, momentum for the recycling program will take off. Achieving recycling goals, lowering costs, realizing environmental benefits, or improving participation are all opportunities to show off program successes.

### Keep track

Track the amount recycled for each material. Work with the recycler to gather this information regularly, such as monthly. Use a database or other system to record and store data. Specific information that should be gathered includes:

- **Quantity of recyclables collected by material** – The amount is typically reported in tons, although measuring pounds can also be meaningful and may be more realistic for your office. Totals by floor, department, or other division may be useful.
- **Quality of recyclables collected** – Excess contamination can cause recyclables to be unmarketable to an end-use manufacturer. Get feedback on the amount and types of contamination from the recycler. Incorporate this into the employee education program.
- **Additional costs or cost savings to the business** – Recycling adds collection and processing services that may increase costs. More material going to recycling rather than disposal, however, may lower overall hauling costs. Be sure to also monitor any costs associated with operating the program.

### Communicate results

Spread the word about program achievements to:

- **Employees** – Success is a great reward. Watching the recycling program grow, reaching goals, and creating benefits will motivate employees to participate.
- **The community** – Announce the recycling program to the community. Show them the company's commitment to the environment. Provide regular updates about program success through media articles, local recycling events, and company outreach to the community. And, include the recycling initiative in company printed materials and on the website.
- **Nationally** – Enter the company's recycling program in a national competition to bring additional recognition to the program's best practices and results.

# 5. Keep it Up

## Sustaining a workplace recycling program takes ongoing effort

- **Make it fun** – Create incentives and rewards to motivate employees.
- **Keep up communication** – Employee education is an ongoing activity. Don't let up. Keep it short, positive, and engaging.
- **Make adjustments as necessary** – Things will likely change as the program grows. Build in flexibility. Communicate any changes to employees and the reason for specific changes.
- **Get employee input** – Survey employees about the program. What's working? What's not? What would improve participation? Recognize employees that provide exceptional efforts to the program.
- **Set achievable goals** – Reaching goals and setting new ones builds progress and movement into the program.
- **Include everyone** – Ensure that the program is not dependent on one "champion" to succeed. A recycling program needs the participation of all employees.

### What About Shredded Office Paper?

For security reasons, businesses may shred some office papers. Some paper mills won't accept shredded office paper. Check with your recycler for special instructions on recycling this material.

## Things to Consider

### Property management

Businesses that share an office building with other tenants will likely need to work with a property management or leasing company to plan a recycling program, as these entities typically contract with the recycler. Property management would participate in program planning and help market the program to other businesses operating in the building.

### Custodial staff

Custodial staff is critical to the success of a recycling program. Ensure that management clearly outlines their role in the program and communicates roles and responsibilities to cleaning staff. Build ongoing training into the program for building maintenance and other personnel who will be directly involved in recycling collection.

### Community partnerships

Reach out to the local recycling community and get their help. Assistance from community and business leaders that have experience and knowledge about workplace recycling will vastly enhance the value of your program. They can also be great advocates.

### Find These Tools Online

As you get ready to begin your recycling program you may want to check out online recycling resources provided by AF&PA, its member companies and your local recycler. To get your workplace recycling program off the ground, visit [www.afandpa.org/recycling](http://www.afandpa.org/recycling) for help with:

- Conducting a recycling audit
- Negotiating with your recycler
- Securing company management support
- Communicating to employees
- Locating paper recycling statistics



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