

# CHAPTER 10 MATERIALS IN THE WORKPLACE

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## INTRODUCTION

**M**aster Recyclers are usually the sustainability champions wherever they go, including the workplace.

As a Master Recycler, it is likely that your co-workers will look to you for information and motivation because they see your commitment. You can help keep momentum going, seek out answers and resources, and identify barriers in your workplace.

Sustainability champions should also realize that it is not sustainable to try and go at it alone. You can pull out recyclables from the garbage, bring your own mug to work, and lug special plastics to the local depot yourself, or you can get your workplace organized so everyone plays a part and policies are put in place that dramatically reduce the consumption of our natural resources.

The free resources available in our region work best when a workplace champion is onsite and can tailor the approach to their specific workplace. This chapter will help you think through the best way to utilize these resources.



## COMMERCIAL MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

As you can imagine, there are many work sectors in the metro area and each use and discard a large quantity and variety of specific materials. The strategies to manage these materials are equally variable. Despite the wide range, some approaches can be generalized and tailored for each sector. Master Recyclers utilize their skills and enthusiasm to help conserve our natural resources in each and every one of these sectors, and in settings that range from a tiny office to a large factory. Master Recyclers have found making change at work to be rewarding because these changes can make a big impact.

Some Master Recyclers have also found that including the training and experience from the program on your résumé can greatly increase your value to potential employers who want to improve their sustainability practices.



## COLLECTION PROGRAMS AT WORK

### Standard collection services

Like in the residential collection system, in Washington County (excluding unincorporated areas), Clackamas County and Multnomah County (excluding Portland), garbage and recycling companies serving businesses are franchised. You will recall from previous chapters that means they contract to serve designated territories and offer standardized services and fees, much like the residential services.

Portland differs in that hauling companies compete with one another for commercial accounts. They also set their own rates and services. Haulers do, however, have to meet some basic requirements to receive a permit to operate in Portland. These basic requirements include providing at least the basic recycling and composting that is required of businesses. Commercial haulers in unincorporated Washington County have certificates that regulate a set of standards, much like the franchised system.

Throughout the region, the same materials that residents may leave at the curb are also accepted from businesses. However, businesses will often separate out more valuable materials like cardboard, scrap metal, or office paper to be sold or to reduce costs in hauler fees.

## RESOURCE

*Find the Business Food Separation Requirement factsheet online to learn more about the types of businesses and types of materials included in the policy. There is also an estimation guide to help you estimate the quantity of food scraps the business where you work generates.*

## Business Recycling Requirements (BRR)

Lots of businesses throughout the metropolitan region are doing their part by recycling at work. However, during an average year, businesses in the area still throw away more than 100,000 tons of recyclable paper and containers. These valuable materials should be recovered and processed to help us conserve natural resources.

For this reason, Metro adopted Business Recycling Requirements (BRR), where businesses must:

- Recycle paper, cardboard and containers (aluminum cans, plastic bottles, jugs, buckets, and round container, and glass bottles and jars).
- Ensure there are collection containers for these materials.
- Post signs at collection areas, indicating which materials should be recycled.

## RESOURCE

*To find your local contact go to Metro's guide to recycling at work online.*

While this is a Metro requirement, local governments are responsible for enforcement and most cities and counties have adopted local ordinances to match the Metro rule. These requirements can sometimes seem complicated due to many players such as a landlord, property manager, multiple tenants and staff. Ultimately, it is the property manager's responsibility to ensure compliance with proper business recycling through hauler provided services.

In July 2018, the Metro Council adopted code language requiring most food producing businesses to separate their food scraps from other garbage by the end of 2024.



Metro and local jurisdictions focus on an assistance-based approach to gaining compliance and supporting businesses to achieve sustainability goals above and beyond basic recycling requirements.

Most Metro area jurisdictions provide free, customized assistance to all types of businesses. Recycling Specialists can help your business with:

- On-site evaluations
- Working with waste haulers and property managers
- Finding solutions for some items not accepted curbside
- Resources for sustainable purchasing
- Free education materials, containers and signage
- Presentations
- Employee training
- Additional business sustainability opportunities

## Awards programs

Along with technical assistance, local jurisdictions also recognize businesses that go above and beyond. Clackamas and Washington Counties and the City of Gresham have certification programs to showcase businesses demonstrating a deeper commitment to sustainability. Visit your local business assistance program website to learn what is available. These programs are a great way to encourage your workplace to strive to do better.



## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### What counts as Master Recycler volunteer hours at work?

Master Recyclers are a volunteer outreach corps. The program was not created to train professional sustainability coordinators or managers. However, that does not mean that projects at work are off limits for volunteer hours. On the contrary, it is incredibly valuable to have trained workplace champions.

If you decide to do a project at work, it will count as Master Recycler hours if the work involved with the project is above and beyond your normal job description. Master Recycler bartenders, administrative assistants, bus drivers, veterinarians, factory managers and nurses have implemented long lasting changes in their workplaces. Starting a green team, acting as an office champion, helping implement strategies and systems of change, organizing events and lunch and learn presentations all count as hours. Tasks that are expected of you as part of your job because you are a sustainability coordinator do not count as volunteer hours.

If you are thinking about doing a project in your workplace and are not sure if it would count as volunteer hours you can ask the Master Recycler Program Manager ([masterrecycler@oregonmetro.gov](mailto:masterrecycler@oregonmetro.gov)).

## FIVE PROJECTS

**G**etting started on a workplace project is easier than you think. The five ideas listed below (and discussed in greater detail in the rest of this chapter) are great potential projects. Business Recycling Specialists will help you tailor these strategies to fit the specific needs of your organization.

- 1. Form a green project team.** You may be the recycling champion who will track and guide your workplace efforts, but you don't have to do it alone. Starting a green project team spreads the work and improves communication with co-workers, business and building managers, custodial staff and haulers. Importantly, it also helps spread this knowledge out in your workplace and helps ensure the practices stay in place as people change jobs.
- 2. Conduct a sustainability assessment.** Examining purchasing, waste, and other aspects of your business can reveal opportunities for reducing consumption and disposal while improving your organization's financial, social and environmental bottom lines.
- 3. Implement best practices.** Put a few best practices in place and you will be pleasantly surprised at the results.
- 4. Promotion and outreach.** Once your workplace recycling system is set up, it's crucial to let co-workers know how to use the system through varied and ongoing outreach strategies.
- 5. Setting policy.** Sustain your efforts by setting purchasing policies, contracts and job descriptions.

### Before you get started!

*Find out if there is already a designated sustainability coordinator and then work collaboratively with them.*

## Form a green project team

### Recruit committed co-workers

A motivated green project team will share the workload, build support among coworkers and make sure that your recycling efforts are successful.

A Recycling Specialist can help you identify a potential project and get a green project team started. If necessary, they can help you educate leadership and management on the importance of allocating resources and time to a green project team. Support from your management will also ensure that the project is a priority.

Invite committed co-workers who can devote time and energy to the project, and be sure to include a representative from your facilities, maintenance and purchasing departments when applicable to the project. Any co-workers that be directly affected by the project should help with its design.

Once your team is in place, clarify the roles and expectations for each member. Then work together to establish goals and objectives for your project.

## Start with an assessment

A sustainability assessment can help evaluate the flow of materials through your organization. There are many different assessments you can conduct. A purchasing assessment includes everything from one-time large procurement, such as constructing a new building, to smaller day-to-day purchases such as office supplies. Purchasing entails contracts as well as one-time expenses. A waste assessment includes such activities as reviews of disposal records, walk-through evaluations of facilities and operations, and manual sorting of material pulled from garbage containers. Assessments may also include onsite use of materials or manufacturing options in certain sectors.

### Policy assessment

A good place to start is by looking at current policies and contracts that control the flow of materials in and out of the workplace. An audit of the purchasing policies and waste contracts will help you get a good sense of the existing trends and priorities. Do your purchasing policies only focus on cost? If so, then you will know that a good place to start is by integrating environmental and social requirements into the policies. If the current policies include environmental and social requirements, are they being implemented?

A scan of policies and contracts can also alert you to specific obstacles that you may have to work around. Some policies may exist that will conflict with goals you may want to set. Contracts may already be in existence with paper purchasing or custodial companies that do not include new potential requirements or tasks. It will be helpful to know this ahead of time so that you can plan a work-around until the contract term ends and a new one can integrate the new requirements and tasks. Learn this ahead of time so that you can plan a work-around until the contract term ends and the new one starts that includes new requirements and tasks.

### Waste assessment

A waste assessment can reveal opportunities for reducing disposal costs and improving your organization's financial and environmental bottom lines. It allows you to develop baseline data on the quantity and type of waste your organization generates. **Baseline data can be used to:**

- Estimate cost savings potential of recycling and waste prevention activities.
- Identify specific materials to target for inclusion in recycling and waste reduction efforts.
- Measure progress and communicate results to employees.

Conducting a waste assessment may involve many people within an organization. However, one person will need to be responsible for coordinating the assessment and recruiting a team. This individual should be familiar with the overall operations of the organization and in particular with purchasing, garbage collection services, and janitorial contracting. The team size will vary depending on the size of the organization. A small sort team may consist of one or two people and larger organizations may create a team that includes staff from environmental health and safety; building supervisors; officials involved with the technical/operational, administrative, facilities maintenance and/or purchasing aspects of your organization; or employees interested in waste reduction.

## Conduct a facility walk-through

A facility walk-through provides the waste assessment coordinator with valuable information regarding the day-to-day activities that ultimately affect the waste stream. A walk-through can include more than just waste assessment. Most Recycling Specialists are trained to include other materials management goals when helping you with a walk-through.

### A waste assessment walk-through lets you:

- Observe the types and amounts of waste produced.
- Identify waste-producing or waste-reducing activities.
- Account for all garbage and recycling collection equipment and locations.
- Detect inefficiencies in operations.
- Map the path by which waste moves through the organization.
- Observe the layout of operations.
- Observe current recycling and waste prevention educational efforts.

The facility walk-through and assessment provide the coordinator with the information necessary to plan a sort strategy. What is the date and time the waste should be collected for sorting? Where is a good location to conduct the sort? How much waste needs to be sorted? From which parts of the facilities should waste be pulled from to compile the sample? What material categories should waste be sorted into? Answering these questions along with information gained from employee interviews or surveys, will help the waste assessment coordinator properly manage the sort preparation and implementation.

## Staying safe during the waste sort

Develop a health-and-safety plan for the unexpected injury or accident to occur while conducting a waste sort. Communication is crucial to ensure that each team member understands the correct procedures, the potential hazards, and the risk reduction plan.

Risks will vary for each workplace. However, common hazards include: sharp objects in the materials being sorted, such as needles or broken glass and chemical or infectious waste. Injury can also occur from lifting heavy waste bags or encountering on-site vehicles or machinery.

### Plan the waste sort

Determine sort categories and prepare data sheets before the sort. Information gathered from the walk through will help determine what categories of waste to include on your data sheets. Determine sampling and sorting procedures and set a standardized process for all participants to follow. This will help maintain consistency and ensure data integrity.

### Consider the following questions:

- Are there waste containers that should not be included in the waste audit because they include dangerous materials such as medical waste, potentially hazardous materials, loose animal or human waste, medical syringes, or broken glass?
- Are you going to audit all waste containers or sample from various parts of the work place?
- Are you going to focus on just one potential waste stream (like food waste or paper or plastics) or will all of the material be assessed?
- Are you sorting materials for curbside recycling or are there other materials you also want to identify (like non-curbside plastics)?
- When are containers most full, so that you don't set your sorting date right after containers are emptied?
- What is the safest location to sort?

Most local jurisdictions have waste audit scales, containers and instructions that you can check out, use, clean and return. Check with your local Recycle Specialist to see what is available.







## Implement best practices

Once you have all key participants on board and have a plan for who will haul the recycling and compost where, you now know how materials should be separated. Next step is to get containers and signage. Smaller containers are best located close to workers and larger containers with clear signage to collect materials in one place for servicing by the garbage and recycling companies. Most local governments will provide free internal containers and signage that can be tailored for your work. Here are a few best practices that will maximize success.

### Buddy system

Always pair garbage and recycling containers side-by-side. This will make it more likely to capture more recycling while keeping contamination to a minimum.

Most local governments can provide free desk-side recycling boxes to set next to garbage containers at desks or other work spaces. Unless you have a highly motivated group, do not consider removing the garbage can. This approach will likely result in contaminated recycling.



### Centralized vs. distributed recycling pickup

Often custodial contracts include garbage collection at each desk, but office workers have to get up and empty their recycling when their desk side boxes are full. If deskside garbage pickup is provided, find out if recycling can be included. If not now, when it is time for contract renewal, consider including this option. You can also cut custodial costs by having office workers take both garbage and recycling to the central collection container.

### Signage

Rather than making your own, request signage from your Recycling Specialist. These signs were designed to be the most effective tools possible in getting materials where they belong. They utilize more pictures than words, and can include specific languages that may be needed in your work place.





## Promotion and outreach

### Education, incentives and fun

Often people think that the reason that their co-workers are not recycling right is because they just don't know better or worse, don't care. It is more likely that the system is confusing. After ensuring the best practices above are in place, education is the next step.

#### Here are some ways to tell your co-workers how to use the new system:

- Send out periodic emails with instructions and eco-tips.
- Utilize existing communication channels such as a staff newsletter, lunchroom board, or employee website to share messages about changes, to give instructions and to keep people engaged.
- Offer green-bag lunch time presentations on special topics.
- Let everyone know about goals and how they can do their part to meet them. Post charts in prominent places that show the progress toward goals. Make announcements during meetings, by email, through an office newsletter or on a shared web page that let people know when you have passed a major milestone toward the goals.
- Consider prizes to reward folks who do a great job and encourage others.
- Competitions are effective, fun ways to give feedback. Teams or individuals can strive to get to certain goals first.
- Share stories about how co-workers are making changes and succeeding.
- Have co-workers wear buttons or place signs in their workplace to show they are on board with the changes.

## Setting policy

Don't let all your great efforts go to waste. Take advantage of the positive support that current management is showing toward these sustainability efforts by ensuring that they will continue into the future. Setting policies that make clear requirements toward environmental and social goals, define who is responsible for carrying out these goals, and measure the progress will help ensure the shifts you made today become a lasting part of the institution where you work.

One place to focus is workplace purchasing. Sustainable procurement means taking into account your procurement actions and carefully evaluating what you buy. Make an impact by purchasing specific products and services with high environmental performance that include social and economic benefits.

Sustainable procurement activities can range from buying recycled paper or less-toxic cleaning products, to the retrofitting or construction of buildings with high energy efficiency standards or developing an alternative fuel fleet.

Contracts can also include socially responsible requirements such as paid sick leave for workers and safety training and standards.

### Sustainable purchasing policies and contracting may include:

- Recycled content.** Setting a policy that supplies are made from 100 percent recycled material is likely not a realistic policy. Not all products are offered with such a high level of recycled materials and some are much more expensive than those made from virgin materials. But you could identify the top three supplies that must be made from at least some recycled content. Identify the supplies that are purchased most frequently in your work place and research if there is a similar product that is made from at least 30 percent post-consumer recycled content. Determine if the price of this alternative is within your organizational budget.
- Toxics.** Use cleaning products with less toxic chemicals. When chemicals must be used, train staff to use only what is needed. Require that products disclose ingredients used.
- Buildings.** Identify required standards for buildings, furniture and office fixtures that include sustainable material, reuse and salvage.
- Sweatshop free.** Purchase products or prioritize products that offer safe and dignified work for their employees and the contracted companies.
- Lunchroom.** Install a dishwasher and provide durable dishes. Pay for a service to wash and put away dishes so staff don't have to. Set up food scrap collection.



**Your Recycling Specialist can help you get resources to meet these goals.**

## FOOD IN A COMMERCIAL SETTING

Whether you are managing food in your lunchroom or you work in a large food waste generator like a school, grocery or restaurant, food is an important part of any sustainability plan due to its high climate impact. As you will learn in the food chapter, the growing and processing of food requires enormous natural resources. Meanwhile there are people in our region who do not have access to fresh healthy food. Businesses can play a role in utilizing those resources to their maximum level with three words: Prevent. Donate. Compost.

### Food Waste Stops with Me

As food professionals, businesses have the power to eliminate significant amounts of waste. They can order just the right amount, use it from tip to tail and root to leaf, show colleagues and customers what's possible—and delicious.

Food Waste Stops with Me is a great resource available on Metro's website that provides resources such as webinars, podcasts and case studies in three main categories: Prevention, donation and composting. Topics address different parts of the business food cycle – things like purchasing, menu planning, storage, food prep, staff training and inventory management.

Food Waste Stops with Me is a collaboration between Metro, the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, as well as city and county governments to help food service businesses reduce food waste

#### Other resources available to businesses to help reduce food waste:

- The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's "Wasted Food Wasted Money" campaign provides resources and information that can help food service businesses take meaningful steps to reduce their food waste and save money.
- Hotel Kitchen also provides a toolkit to help employees of food service businesses reduce waste at various stages in the preparation and serving of food.
- The National Restaurant Association's Conserve program provides information and practical tools that assists food service businesses to reduce food waste.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also provides tools to help businesses prevent and divert wasted food. These tools include guides for assessing and analyzing where food waste occurs, calculators for measuring the cost competitiveness of alternatives to food waste disposal, training webinars and other resources.



*Explore Food Waste Stops with Me to learn more about how you can reduce food waste at work.*





## Food Donation

The long-term solution to hunger is not food donation, but to address the root causes of food insecurity—equitable access to food, housing, healthcare, transportation and more. The excess food that businesses have to donate is not the answer to food insecurity and food banks will never be able to eliminate hunger through collecting and distributing excess and donated food alone, no matter how big their networks may grow.

Secondly, surplus food being produced by businesses is a result of inefficiencies that point to opportunities to reduce waste and prevent the excess from happening in the first place.

That said, although we need to strive to prevent hunger while at the same time reducing surplus food waste in businesses, rescued and donated foods can still play a role in getting nutritious food to people who are experiencing food insecurity.

### CREDIT

*Oregon Food Bank's mission is "to eliminate hunger and its root causes...because no one should be hungry." Through a network of 21 Regional Food Banks and more than 1,200 food assistance sites, the organization works to end hunger on two fronts: helping people access nutritious food today; and building community power to eliminate the root causes of hunger for good.*

### Benefits to businesses:

While steps can be taken to plan and prepare food carefully, sometimes excess food and unused ingredients are inevitable. Benefits include:

- Support the community - Donating healthy, edible food can have a big impact in people's lives.
- Stay competitive - Employees and customers want to support businesses that have sustainable practices. By tracking the type and amount of donations, businesses may identify other opportunities to reduce food waste and costs through their operations.
- Conserve resources - donations help ensure that the valuable resources such as water, land and energy that went into producing, processing, shipping and storing food are not wasted.
- Liability and tax incentives - Federal and state laws protect businesses from liability when they donate food in good faith that they believe to be safe and edible (Bill Emerson Food Donation Act and Oregon Good Samaritan Law). Businesses that donate are eligible for federal tax deductions. They should work with their accountant or business manager for financial advice.

### How to help connect food businesses to food rescue agencies:

Go to [foodwastestopswithme.org/donate](http://foodwastestopswithme.org/donate) to connect with local government program staff who can:

- Help you identify local organizations serving donated food in the community.
- Help you identify supplies the businesses may need (e.g., labels, food-grade plastic bags, durable containers with lids, donation tracking logs).

- Provide free resources, technical assistance and food waste prevention tools.

### Tips for successful donation:

- Build partnerships and get to know the food donation organizations in the community to understand what types of foods they can accept.
- Always call ahead. Food donation organizations need to assess the time, effort and coordination necessary to pick up or receive donated food.
- Prioritize the donation of healthy food most desired by food rescue organizations and the people they serve; avoid sending unusable food that they then may have to dispose of later.
- If possible, establish a regular frequency of donations and provide larger quantities of food rather than small sporadic donations. For small or infrequent quantities consider donating to employees first.
- Work with donation partners to establish a system for labeling and tracking donations.



## Compost

Food waste that can't be donated (food prep scraps, uneaten plate waste, and food that's gone bad) can be composted. Composting has many benefits.

Wasted food that ends up in our closed landfills breaks down and emits methane which is a potent greenhouse gas. Our landfills are able to capture some of the methane, but the rest is released into the atmosphere. Food scraps from businesses in the region are transported to a compost facility and turned into biogas, compost, mulch and fertilizer.

**Please note:** We learned in the Recovery Infrastructure Chapter that residential and commercial organic waste go to different facilities that accept different materials. Facilities that accept food scraps from residential curbside collection program need a certain level of carbon matter to function correctly. Residential compost is made mostly of yard debris which is high in carbon materials like leaves and wood. Residential food scrap programs also accept some other fibrous materials such as paper products including napkins, teabags, coffee filters and pizza boxes.

To start food composting in your workplace, contact your local Recycling Specialist.





## CONCLUSION

There are a lot of business people who believe that climate change is a problem and that we ought to take action now. Because our region started early on the path of green business practices and because we have been leaders in improving how we make products, we are able to prosper by exporting sustainable goods, services and ideas. People are moving to this community because they like the sustainability values that they see here.

As a Master Recycler, you are uniquely positioned to have significant impacts at your place of work. No one knows your workplace and its unique challenges like you do.

