Five Easy Steps to Foodservice Recycling

A Dockside Guide for the Hospitality Industry
RECYCLING has become more than a feel-good activity. Business owners, facility managers and consumers alike recognize recycling as an act of environmental and economic stewardship. Recycling growth has been fueled by the engine of America’s manufacturing industry. Industries such as aluminum, plastic and paper all depend on recycled material to produce new products that are viable commodities to be used again. As foodservice operators and business owners, your environmental responsibility is integral to your community’s long-term growth. Not only is recycling good for the environment, it is good for business. You can further develop your relationship with customers as they learn about your recycling initiatives, and, in some cases, your business may save money. The reason to recycle in many cities is quite simple. It is the law. Cities look to your leadership to provide a separate stream of material that will be used as feedstock to produce future products. This guide for owners, managers and staff will help you properly launch and maintain a cost-efficient beneficial recycling program. For more information, visit www.recycle-steel.org.
Foodservice feeds nation’s solid waste

According to the National Restaurant Association (NRA), restaurants and other foodservice facilities account for two percent of our nation’s total solid waste, which is comprised of more than six million tons.

About one and a half pounds of trash are produced for each restaurant meal served. For example, at fast food restaurants, approximately 200 pounds of waste is generated for every $1,000 in sales. These statistics indicate how much garbage the restaurant industry generates.

Navigating the regulatory environment

Across the country, more local governments are encouraging successful residential recycling efforts. Now, governments are focusing on commercial recycling programs that include foodservice operations. Mandated recycling is fast becoming an acceptable way for governments to help initiate programs. Navigating the legislative horizon can be a challenge, but is beneficial to a business to determine the best course forward.

Increasingly, local governments are diverting more material from local landfills—not only because diversion is good for the environment, but also because diverting more material may help local governments reduce costs. And, those governments increasingly target foodservice operations as a way to obtain recyclables and divert waste. Cities meet this challenge by either asking or mandating local restaurants, prisons, hospitals and schools launch and maintain comprehensive dockside recycling programs (the business counterpart to residential curbside recycling).
Regulations are different in every city, so check with your local government or recycling office before launching a recycling program.

Some common requirements of mandated recycling legislation include:

- Business operators must submit a Commercial Solid Waste Recycling Plan to local government, which also must be kept on file at a business posted in appropriate public areas and distributed to employees.
- Information about the type of business, owner name, contact information, manager information (if appropriate), as well as the name of the employee who is the designated recycling coordinator must be noted.
- Any licenses or business permit numbers must be included in the recycling plan.
- List all kinds of material or items used at the facility (i.e., steel cans, aluminum beverage cans, corrugated paper, plastics, etc.)
- Make a tonnage estimate of the materials with the help of a hauler, consultant or by evaluating annual materials purchases (i.e., cases of steel food cans, cases of office paper).
- Some communities require purchasing of materials included in the recycling program. If so, include information on what materials will be phased in.
- Designate the hauler or trash service and include any service licensing numbers in the recycling plan.
- Exemptions may be possible, but must be applied for in most cities.

RECYCLING AND WASTE REDUCTION ARE SMART, LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS. A WELL-DESIGNED RECYCLING PROGRAM WILL ADD VALUE TO YOUR ESTABLISHMENT WITHOUT SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASING COSTS.

Green marketing moves into foodservice

Making the correct environmental choices can be beneficial for business. It helps let people know a business is doing its part. Customers, employees and industry colleagues will be interested to learn you are handling recycling because there is a good chance they also do it at home or work.

Major chains, as well as thousands of independent restaurants across the country, have already become ‘green marketers’—reducing waste, selecting foods packaged in recyclable containers, and establishing comprehensive, cost-saving recycling programs. Additionally, institutional hospitals have also launched successful environmental and dockside recycling programs.

There are a number of different ways to market your recycling accomplishments, one being producing material to help you deliver your recycling message and commitment, including:

- Table tents
- Menu notes
- Local advertising
- Involvement in special events
- Press releases
- Receipt notes
- Social media
Launching Your Program

Goals

Goals are to provide customers a good value (i.e. service, ambiance, food) and to make an establishment profitable, as well as to be compliant with food, health and occupational requirements.

The goals of a hauler are not much different—to provide customers good value (in terms of quality, service and price) and to make a profit. Recycling is likely to be an additional service they will provide, but they, too, will expect to make a profit.

It is also important to be realistic about the goals of a recycling program. Many costs in recycling are fixed and it may cost an establishment money to recycle. Volume is an important consideration. Therefore, opportunities may arise to pool recyclables with other establishments to leverage a better price with a hauler.

Larger establishments greater incentives to launch a more extensive program. Fixed costs can be dispersed over larger volumes. Garbage hauling savings can be greater. There might be more material to recycle.

Design the recycling program with a hauler, and examine start-up costs and adjustments, as well as business changes.
Examining Your Establishment

**What are recyclables?**

Recyclables are everyday products. Empty steel food cans. Empty steel paint and aerosol cans. Paper products, certain types of plastic, and clear, green or brown glass packaging.

Recyclables are placed in a container, picked up by a waste hauler and processed for shipment to mills to be manufactured back into products. Water can also be recycled and reclaimed by large operations after its initial use—or reused for landscaping. Even food waste can be composted into usable mulch and fertilizer, when such programs are available.

It is easy to identify recyclables in a foodservice operation:

- All steel food cans
- Glass (all colors)
- Plastic containers (check with local recycling coordinator)
- Aluminum beverage cans
- Paper (tray liners, utensils, plates, napkins, etc.)

Recycling programs are established in communities primarily to reduce the solid waste stream. Besides saving landfill space, recycling saves valuable energy and natural resources.

**What’s in the waste?**

To identify the waste a business generates, conduct a waste audit by inspecting different areas of the establishment.

In the dining areas, beverage bottles or cans and uneaten food make up the bulk of the waste.

Kitchen and preparation areas generate trimmings and food waste, as well as packaging waste like cardboard, steel cans, glass bottles, aluminum beverage cans and bags.

In addition to generally recognized recyclables like paper, steel cans and bottles, establishments generate other materials such as cleaning supplies, grease or oils, and food waste. For help in evaluating your waste stream, ask a hauler or a professional waste auditor for help.

**Working with haulers**

In working with haulers, it is important to be able to provide some key information. Some of these tactics will help maximize the costs and benefits an operation will derive from a successful recycling program:

- Conduct a complete waste audit to identify trash and recyclables.
- Invite a few haulers to bid on the establishment, taking the waste audit into consideration.
- After bidding, compare haulers and determine what company is providing the best price. Consider how many times recyclables will be collected, customer service, billing terms, extra pick-up during peak seasons, contract length and any additional contract fees.
- Negotiate based on the volume of recyclables and other factors. Consider using an out-of-town hauler whose price may be better, to use in negotiation with closer, local haulers. Haulers from neighboring cities may offer a better price to get business.
- Be aware of local recycling regulations.
- Consult with other restaurants and local associations to obtain referrals.

See Steel Packaging Worksheet on the next page.
Dockside Recycling for Foodservice Operations
Steel Packaging Worksheet

Many containers in your foodservice kitchen are made from North America’s #1 recycled material - steel. Use this worksheet to quickly and easily determine your monthly volume of steel cans. Then work with your hauler of your recycling services contractor to include steel cans in your recycling program. Waste management costs should be comparable or improved over current costs. And, you’ll be contributing to your community’s efforts to recycle more and reduce waste. For more information about the Steel Recycling Institute or steel can recycling, visit www.recycle-steel.org.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Type</th>
<th>Product Net Weight</th>
<th>Empty Can Weight</th>
<th>Cans Per Case</th>
<th>Empty Case Weight divide by 16 oz.</th>
<th>Cases Per Month</th>
<th>Weight Per Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beverage</td>
<td>12 oz.</td>
<td>1.1 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>1.8 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice</td>
<td>6 oz.</td>
<td>1.3 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>15 oz.</td>
<td>1.9 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>28 oz.</td>
<td>4 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice</td>
<td>46 oz.</td>
<td>5.6 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>39 oz.</td>
<td>11 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food/Juice</td>
<td>1 gal.</td>
<td>12 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>5 gal.</td>
<td>36-48 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerosol</td>
<td>16 oz.</td>
<td>4 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking Oil</td>
<td>oblong</td>
<td>13 oz.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>lbs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To calculate your monthly weight of steel cans, follow these steps for each Product Type:
1. Multiply Empty Can Weight by Cans Per Case for the Empty Case Weight (in ounces).
2. Divide this number by 16 oz. to obtain the Empty Case Weight (in pounds).
3. Multiply the Empty Case Weight by Cases Per Month to obtain the Weight Per Month.
4. Add the figures in the Weight Per Month column to obtain the Total Weight Per Month.

Total Weight Per Month __________________________ lbs.
Reducing and Reusing

**Reducing: materials to eliminate or substitute**

Work with product suppliers to reduce packaging. Inform them about over-packaged products. Excess packaging costs money to produce, transport and dispose of.

Buy in bulk, or the concentrated form of products. For example, fruit comes in several sizes of steel containers. Make sure a switch of this sort does not lead to additional food waste and cost.

Reduce the numbers of service items taken by customers or given out by staff. Ask if customers want water, straws or condiments. Offer discounts for consumers who bring their own mugs or cups. This can help save on costs of purchase and disposal and can help build repeat business.

Investigate disposable napkins and headwear. Consider reusable linens. Items like these can also attribute to change in pricing structure through improved ambiance.

Think creatively about big items in the waste stream. There is often a demand for empty, five-gallon pails.

Big items like appliances should be recycled after they have completed their long service lives.

**Reusing: materials to donate**

Prepared and perishable foods can be donated to local food banks for use by soup kitchens and other charities. This can reduce waste and perhaps qualify as a charitable donation.

Develop a program with local food depositories. They may even make local pick-ups and deliver foods to charities.
Getting Ready to Recycle

What you can do

Look at the results of the waste audit. Work with a hauler to determine the type and quantity of recyclables in the waste stream. Widely recycled materials—glass, steel cans and corrugated cardboard—are pretty standard for all programs.

Tips for effective recycling

- **Balers**
  If corrugated cardboard accounts for a large volume of waste (30-40 percent), consider purchasing a baler. Baled corrugated might be easier for a hauler to collect and could save time and money. Balers can quickly pay for themselves, but be sure to study this option. If a hauler furnishes you with a baler, expect to commit to a long-term contract.

- **Keep waxy cardboard out of the recycling bin**
  Paper is recycled by soaking the fibers apart in water. The wax coating that keeps a broccoli or fruit box from coming apart under ice also keeps it from coming apart during the recycling process.

- **Save your oils**
  Used shortening and cooking oil can often be collected for refining, and grease haulers may even pay for this material. Search ‘grease haulers’ online for this service.

- **Tips for recycling steel cans**
  Steel cans usually are stored before they are recycled. Give cans a rinse in leftover dishwater or extra space in a dishwasher. Flatten your cans for economical storage and transportation. For best results, remove lids from both ends, then store the lids in a can that you crimp shut when full.

- **Can crushers**
  For high-volume operations, can crushers are a wise investment. A can crusher will allow kitchen staff to safely and quickly flatten cans as well as save valuable space.
Training and Promotion

**Tips for owners and customers**

- **Work with a hauler to optimize the recycling program.** Be certain staff is trained and engaged. Set goals for the programs and ensure the programs are enhancing overall operation. Set a cycle of monitoring, adjusting and improving.

- **Tell employees that recycling is the right thing to do for your business and the community.** It is good for business and the community. Make it a part of routine training via staff meetings, posters and tip cards.

- **Let customers know they are helping to do their part for the community by participating in the process.** Promote the facility program through signage or notes on the menu.

**Customer relations**

- **The most important person is the customer.** Customers will appreciate a facility’s environmental commitment of recycling. By letting customers know about recycling policies, they can work with the facility and take pride in engaging in the program.

- **Consider the following:**
  - Promote the program on menus, table tents and counter cards.
  - Consider lapel pins and special name tags for employees printed with a simple environmental message.
  - Survey customers on a customer comment card regarding their environmental knowledge.
  - Award employees that make extra environmental efforts.
  - Honor customers that display loyalty or environmental leadership.
  - Offer tours for community leaders to see the success of recycling programs.
  - Promote the program through social media and blogs.

Look for other opportunities as the recycling program grows.
About the Steel Recycling Institute

The Steel Recycling Institute (SRI), a unit of the American Iron and Steel Institute, educates the solid waste management industry, government, business and, ultimately, the consumer about the economic and environmental benefits of recycling steel. SRI works to ensure the continuing development of the steel recycling infrastructure.