Introduction

Recycling is an effective strategy to reduce waste volume and increase potential cost savings. The Certification for Sustainable Transportation (CST) promotes recycling as one way to improve environmental and economic performance. While lasting and effective recycling programs are each unique, this brief introduces basic concepts and gives tips for transportation companies to develop a program customized for their business.

Benefits of Recycling

Recycling is the process of separating, collecting, and remanufacturing used or waste products into new materials. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the average American generates 4.5 pounds of waste each day, an estimated 60% of which are paper, cardboard, plastic, glass, or aluminum products and could be recycled. Effective recycling programs can help businesses, municipalities, and organizations lessen environmental impact and become more operationally efficient. In most municipalities, recycling costs less than disposal of non-recyclable materials; for example, in a 2011 survey, 15 of 17 North Carolina municipalities reported lower costs for recycling services than for the costs associated with landfills and incinerators. The same study found that over time landfill tipping fees have increased, relative to the cost of recycling services. Further, for businesses, integrating recycling and waste reduction techniques into the culture of the business will ensure long-term costs savings as employees both recycle and reduce the amount of waste they create. Recycling also promotes job creation and indirectly lowers greenhouse gas emissions by reducing raw material extraction and production. According to the Recycling Economic Impact study, in 2001 the recycling and reusing industry nationwide included over 56,000 establishments employing over 1 million people.

Recycling in the Passenger Transportation Sector

A passenger transportation company can establish a recycling program at its administrative offices, as well as provide opportunities for passengers to recycle while traveling on vehicles and while at company facilities. These programs can be as easy as offering office employees a way to recycle used computer paper and printer cartridges or giving transportation passengers a way to recycle their empty coffee cups and newspapers. Some examples of how companies can be innovative in the development of a customized recycling program include:

- Providing incentives for passengers to recycle their waste on bins on vehicles;
- Calculating cost savings of recycling over disposal of non-recyclable waste and then dispersing a portion of those savings to employees;
- Recycling vehicle tires, or organizing a public tire collection event, to be used as rubberized asphalt for paving roads or to be burned as fuel; or
- Instead of paper towels, using passengers’ recycled newspaper to clean vehicle windows.
Tips for an Effective Recycling Program

Here are some tips for developing and implementing an effective recycling program for your company:

- **Know Your Waste and Waste Stream:** A good waste management strategy begins by looking at the types and volumes of waste generated by your company and where they go after disposal. Look for ways to reduce or prevent waste; a recycling program can aid in managing unavoidable waste materials.

- **Select a Recycling Coordinator:** To oversee the recycling program, address questions, and communicate directly with the public, an individual should be assigned as the Recycling Coordinator.

- **Select a Recycling Hauler:** Your current trash hauler may offer recycling pickup, which may economically be your best option. Alternatively, you may need to contract a local recycling company.

- **Establish Collection Guidelines at the Office and on Vehicles:** An effective recycling program establish guidelines regarding collection bin appearance and location, how often the bins are emptied, where the recycled materials are stored, and how often the hauler comes to pick up the materials. Don’t forget to establish these practices on your vehicles in addition to the office.

- **Train Employees:** Support and participation from your employees is essential for a successful recycling program: make sure everyone in the company is aware of the collection guidelines and that they have input about the convenience and effectiveness of the program throughout the design process.

- **Communicate about the Program:** Outreach and education are important ways to let your customers, stakeholders, and the general public know about what your company is doing to be more sustainable, and how they can participate in your recycling program.

- **Evaluate the Recycling Program:** Once your recycling program has been implemented, it's a good idea to evaluate and track the progress your company has made. Compare waste volume before and after the recycling program was implemented, and even determine the recycling rate of your company by dividing the total volume recycled by total waste volume (recycled and non-recycled materials).

Want to Learn More?

Contact us directly at the CST (802) 656-9141, erating.org, or info@erating.org or check out these organizations’ websites:

- National Recycling Coalition: nrrrecycles.org/
- Northeast Recycling Council: www.nerc.org/
- Waste Management: www.wm.com/

References