

COMMERCIAL RECYCLING BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES GUIDE

FACT SHEET

INTRODUCTION

Lincoln and Lancaster County's office buildings, schools, retail stores, hotels, restaurants, multi-family apartments and other commercial and institutional buildings generate roughly half the waste disposed in landfills. In order to accomplish the goals to increase recycling and reduce the amount of waste disposed in landfills that have been established by the City of Lincoln, it is essential for the commercial sector to develop effective waste reduction and recycling programs.

This guide will help your organization implement a successful and sustainable recycling program. This guide is intentionally detailed to help you develop the most successful program possible, so don't be intimidated or overwhelmed by the information provided. Remember, the City of Lincoln Solid Waste Management Division can help you get your recycling program started. We offer grants, rebates, educational materials, recognition of your efforts and professional advice from our staff to help you start or improve your recycling program.

Sustainability and social responsibility are progressively more important to customers and employees, and can have a notable impact on their purchasing and work habits. Demonstrating "green practices" can sway public image and show that your organization is contributing to the conservation of resources.

Why recycle?

Economic: Most of the costs will be upfront when establishing a recycling program, but businesses will find that a properly implemented program can help:

- Minimize monthly costs.
- Reduce waste.
- Promote a sustainable mindset in all functions of the workplace. Decreasing the amount of waste produced by each employee can be a significant factor in reduced operating costs.

Social: Consumers are more socially conscious than ever, and sustainable practices can contribute to:

- Compliance with city code that does not allow corrugated cardboard to be disposed of at the city landfill starting April 1, 2018 (LMC 8.32.040*)
- Enhanced reputation
- Community support

¹ LMC 8.32.040, Sect. C / Recyclable cardboard* shall not be accepted by the City for disposal in the City's public sanitary landfills effective April 1, 2018. (*Clean and dry corrugated cardboard.)

- Increased customer loyalty
- Attracting new customers to your business.

Environmental: Diverting waste away from the landfill helps to protect the environment and conserve resources. It reduces your business’ impact on the environment and promotes good practices in others areas of commercial sustainability. It also saves landfill space, which delays the development of a new landfill.

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR WASTE STREAM

Visit all areas of your facility where waste is generated. Look at the contents of your trash and existing recycling containers to determine how much material is getting thrown away and how well people are recycling. Use the online [recycling self-assessment](#) to determine your current situation and identify opportunities for improvement.

Key information needed to understand your waste stream includes:

- The number and size of garbage and recycling containers on your property.
- Don’t know what size your container is? Refer to this guide on [recycling container sizes and volumes](#).
- The number of times per week the garbage and recycling containers are serviced.
- The monthly cost to service the garbage and recycling containers.
- The fullness of containers at the time of collection.
- For information on converting selected recyclable material volumes to weight click [here](#).
- Assess the amount of recyclables in waste containers and amount of waste in recycling containers. One approach to this is to conduct a visual waste audit. The *Keep America Beautiful Recycling at Work Program* has developed a simple outline for a “[Do-It-Yourself](#)” workplace waste audit.

Many different materials can be recycled and composted. For example, scrap metal, wooden pallets, shrink wrap, vinyl siding, PVC pipes and organic waste can be diverted from the landfill just as paper, glass, plastic containers and cans. Different recyclables may be generated in various areas throughout a business. The following recyclables and organic waste are commonly generated in different areas of a business.

Area	Recycling typically generated	Organic waste typically generated
Employee desks and meeting rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office paper, mail, boxes, cardboard • Plastic food containers and cups • Metal cans • Plastic bottles and jugs • Glass bottles and jars • Food and beverage cartons (e.g., milk, juice, soup) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food waste • Food-soiled paper products
Printing/copy rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office paper, mail, cardboard, boxes (from pens and other office supplies) • Shredded paper 	

Employee break rooms, dining room, cafeteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metal cans • Plastic bottles and jugs • Glass bottles and jars • Newspaper, magazines, boxes (e.g., cereal and cracker boxes) • Plastic food containers and plastic cups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food waste • Food-soiled paper products, certified compostable utensils and certified compostable cups
Restrooms		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper towels
Kitchen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metal cans • Plastic bottles and jugs • Glass bottles and jars (<i>may require separate collection</i>) • Food and beverage cartons (e.g., milk, juice, soup) (<i>not all recycling collectors accept this material</i>) • Plastic wrap and bags (<i>must be collected and recycled separately from single-stream recycling and not all recycling collectors accept this material</i>) • Cardboard, boxes (pasta and cracker boxes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food waste • Certified compostable paper containers, cups and plates • Paper towels
Storage/supply rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper, cardboard, boxes • Plastic bottles • Plastic wrap and bags (<i>must be collected and recycled separately from single-stream recycling and not all recycling collectors accept this material</i>) 	
Front desk/waiting room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metal cans • Plastic bottles and jugs • Glass bottles and jars • Plastic food containers and cups • Newspaper, magazines, mixed paper 	
Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardboard, boxes 	
Shipping and receiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardboard, boxes • Plastic wrap and bags (<i>must be collected and recycled separately from single-stream recycling and not all recycling collectors accept this material</i>) 	

STEP 2: DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

Once you have assessed your current waste situation and identified opportunities for improvement, you are ready to start planning steps to establish or improve your recycling or organics program. Developing your action plan involves figuring out how many and what types of recycling containers your building needs, making any necessary changes to your garbage and recycling collection service, getting management on board, and consulting with your cleaning service.

Determine what containers you need

Think about the places in your building where waste is discarded. Make sure there are enough recycling bins to match the number of garbage bins and that high-traffic areas, such as break rooms, mail rooms, lobbies and kitchens, contain enough recycling bins compared to garbage bins. Make sure your containers are appropriate for the materials you are planning to put into them. For example, consider smaller containers for heavier materials. Make sure that your containers are clearly labeled and color-coded to help people sort their waste correctly and quickly. For more details on the most efficient type, number, and location of collection containers, click [here](#).

Assess your garbage and recycling collection service

Find out how much you are paying for garbage collection service by looking at your bill. Check the terms and duration of your current waste contract. For key things to consider when selecting and contracting for garbage and recycling services click [here](#). Then:

1. Determine what outdoor central containers you need

- Ask what types and sizes of outdoor containers the collector offers (e.g., carts or dumpsters) and their frequency of pick-up to determine if their containers and service frequency meet your business' needs.
- Keep in mind what you found when assessing your garbage containers. Do you think you can divert a lot of your garbage to recycling and/or organics recycling? If so, ask your garbage hauler about downsizing your garbage dumpster or reducing the frequency of pick-ups to save money.
- Avoid unnecessary costs. Start with a small recycling and/or organics recycling dumpster. You can always increase the size of your recycling dumpsters as your collection expands and improves.
- Consider partnering with neighboring businesses for garbage and recycling collection. This may alleviate challenges related to limited space and cost of recycling services.

2. Get quotes

- Call your garbage collector for quotes on adding recycling and/or organics recycling service.
- Request quotes from at least two other collectors to compare prices. Click [here](#) for a list of garbage and recycling collectors.

Lincoln Solid Waste Management Division resources: grants up to \$20,000 to help increase waste diversion and recycling, rebates for up to 50% of the start-up and first six months of collection cost (not to exceed \$750) and staff assistance is available. During development of your action plan is a good time to seek free, professional assistance from the City of Lincoln. City staff members can walk through your building with you to determine the number and sizes of containers you need, and make sure they fit in the spaces (e.g., in cabinets, under countertops, in tight spaces, etc.). Staff can also help brainstorm strategies to overcome challenges as well as offer feedback on ideas, answer your questions and provide educational materials to inform your staff on proper recycling. Visit www.recycle.lincoln.ne.gov to:

Get information on annual recycling grant program to promote commercial and construction waste recycling.

Apply for recycling rebates through the Waste Reduction and Recycling Assistance Program (WRRAP).

Find out how to request free staff assistance. *City staff help you plan for and set up your recycling program.*

Apply to participate in the City's Recycle Lincoln Leadership Recognition program and be recognized for your recycling leadership.

Get management support

Report your findings to your manager or building owner to make sure they support the effort. Point out that recycling demonstrates your organizations' commitment to environmental stewardship and the community. Also, you may be able to reduce size of trash containers and service frequency. Finally, let them know that there are numerous resources available to get you started, such as grants, rebates, educational materials, and City staff assistance.

Consult with cleaning company

Cleaning staff are key players in the success of your recycling program because they are responsible for getting the recycling and garbage out of the building and into the proper containers for pick-up.

STEP 3: SET UP YOUR PROGRAM

Now that you have ordered new containers, have your recycling collection service in place and have management on board, it is time to set up your recycling system.

Set up your recycling containers

Remember the following when setting up your recycling containers:

- Make recycling convenient. It should be just as easy for someone to recycle an item as it is for them to throw it away.
 - Create sorting areas by placing recycling and trash containers next to one another. Set up sorting stations where waste is generated and where there is heavy traffic.
 - If employees do not have recycling bins at their desks, consider setting up an intermediate recycling area for approximately every 20 employees. Make sure the recycling area is conveniently located in a high-traffic area, such as by the break room or restroom.
 - Put a recycling bin by the mailboxes and copy machine so it is convenient for people to recycle when sorting their mail and making copies.
 - If starting an organics recycling program, it may help to start in the kitchen or lunchroom and expand to other areas over time.
- Make recycling easy to understand.
 - Use consistent, color-coded containers and signs with images of items to help people determine where to put their waste. This helps employees distinguish between garbage and recycling streams and increase awareness that not all waste is garbage. The industry color standards are blue for recycling, green for organics, and black or brown for trash.
 - In addition to color-coding, using different shapes of containers and lids or signs, labels or posters can draw attention to the different containers.
 - Place labels and signs on or next to containers so people can refer to them as they sort their waste. Options for placing signs and labels include: on the sides and lids of containers; on the wall; hung from the ceiling; or on an easel. Placing signs at eye level is an effective way to ensure they will be seen. Consider using

multiple signs and labels to reinforce the materials that go in each container. For example, place labels on the front and sides of the containers, labels on the lid and posters on the wall. Additional information on signage is available [here](#).

Set up a central collection area

Make sure you consider the setup of your central garbage and recycling collection area. Keep the following in mind when setting it up:

- Place all of your dumpsters and carts together. If you place the garbage dumpster closer to the building than the recycling or organics recycling dumpsters, this may result in recyclables and food waste being disposed of in the trash dumpster.
- Clearly label all of your dumpsters and carts to help people identify quickly and accurately which waste item goes where.
 - If garbage in recycling dumpsters becomes a problem, consider modifying the containers with restrictive lids or locking the lids to insure that garbage is not placed in recycling containers.
- Include the dumpster area in the training of your cleaning and other staff.

STEP 4: KICK OFF YOUR PROGRAM

Gaining support and buy-in from everyone in your organization is crucial to the success of your recycling program. Train your entire staff to make sure that everyone knows what can and cannot be recycled and that recyclables or organics are sorted, collected and stored properly.

To get your program off to a successful start:

- Plan a training or kick-off event for employees to share the company's recycling goals and show them all the materials that can be recycled.
 - Educate employees on proper recycling to ensure that don't place waste in recycling containers.
 - Plan a short monitoring period in which someone stands by the waste station(s) to help employees and/or customers separate their waste correctly into recycling, organics and garbage bins. This is particularly important with organics recycling, which is a new concept for many people. Having someone available to help with sorting and to answer questions reduces contamination and makes for a smoother transition as people learn new habits. Provide gloves and grabbers for monitors. If your site has sufficient support, maintain monitors beyond the initial stage to help ensure the success of your program.
- Train cleaning staff and make sure everyone knows which containers and bags to use for each type of collected material. If dumpsters are not clearly labeled, decals can be purchased from [Recycle Across America](#).

Promote your program

Promoting your program to employees and customers is critical to ongoing success. Businesses have used a variety of techniques to promote their recycling and/or organics recycling programs that make it fun and educational for employees and customers. Some methods include:

- Creating a competition between floors, departments, etc. to see who can improve recycling the most.
- Forming a green team or appointing recycling champions to help educate employees and customers. Green teams or champions can keep everyone informed of the business' progress toward reducing waste and recycling more, and spearheading additional environmental efforts. Click [here](#) for more information on forming green teams.

Make sure to let customers know about your program. Organizations are evaluated on many aspects of their performance, including their environmental stewardship. Waste reduction and recycling programs show customers and vendors that your organization cares about the community and environment. So, share your recycling efforts, goals and results with customers. In order to get the best results from your recycling plan, it is important to start by setting goals.

One approach to letting the community know about your efforts is to participate in the City's [Recycle Lincoln Leadership Recognition Program](#).

STEP 5: MONITOR, TRACK, ADJUST

To ensure that all employees and management are participating and implementing the program correctly, make regular checks of garbage and recycling containers. Here are some tips to consider when implementing a program.

- Work with cleaning company or recycling collect to monitor progress and estimate the amount of waste and recycling generated.
 - Report diversion amounts to employees and status of reaching your organization's diversion goals.
- Praise success and discuss challenges.
- If problems are identified, consider forming a green team to help with communication and employee engagement within the organization.
- After a period of time, conduct waste assessments to determine the amount of recyclables in your garbage or garbage in your recyclables. Share your results. Information on conducting a "Do-It-Yourself" waste audit is available through the *Keep America Beautiful Recycling at Work* website.
- Consider new areas to reduce or recycle waste within your organization. These include:
 - Expand the types of materials recycled or composted; or
 - Review purchasing procedures to reduce waste generation.

Tips to reduce waste

Reducing waste is even better than recycling. Are there items in your garbage or recycling that you could reduce, eliminate or replace with greener alternatives? Reducing waste is an effective approach to saving money and natural resources, and there are steps you can take in every area of your business to do so. Consider these:

- Set printer defaults to print double-sided, and encourage employees to print less.
- Replace plastic cups, plates and utensils with reusable counterparts. Provide reusable dishes in break rooms and kitchens, and encourage employees to bring lunches in reusable containers.

- Adopt green purchasing policies, such as selecting products that are less toxic, conserve energy or water, or use recycled-content materials.
- Reduce packaging waste by buying supplies in bulk and using reusable shipping containers.
- Reuse unwanted supplies and other items by exchanging them with other businesses through the [Nebraska Materials Exchange Program](#).
- Host green meetings.
- Choose non-hazardous or less-hazardous cleaning products and use reusable towels and rags.
- Evaluate your company's processes to identify ways to use raw materials more efficiently and use less-hazardous alternatives.

Click here for [more information and tips for reducing waste](#) for businesses.

LINKS AND RESOURCES

- **Commercial Recycling Self-Assessment and Waste Diversion Rate Calculator**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/self-assessment.htm>
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/waste-diversion-calculator.htm>
- **Common Recycling Containers**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/fact-sheets/pdf/common-recycling-containers.pdf>
- **Corrugated Cardboard Disposal Ban FAQ**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/corrugated-cardboard.htm>
- **Estimating Material Weight**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/fact-sheets/pdf/estimating-material-weight.pdf>
- **Guide to Commercial Green Teams**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/fact-sheets/pdf/green-teams.pdf>
- **Guide to Selecting / Contracting for Garbage and Recycling Collection**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/fact-sheets/pdf/collection-contracting.pdf>
- **Local Garbage and Recycling Collectors**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/collectors.htm>
- **Nebraska Materials Exchange Program**
<http://www.knb.org/exchange.html>
- **Recycling Container Sizes and Volumes**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/fact-sheets/pdf/container-sizes-volumes.pdf>
- **Recycling Guidelines by Material**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/wrrap/recognition.htm>
- **Recycle Lincoln Leadership Recognition Program**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/wrrap/recognition.htm>
- **Recycling at Work DIY Simple Workplace Waste Audit**

http://recyclingatwork.org/Downloads/DIY_Simple_Workplace_Waste_Audit.pdf

- **Recycling Processing Centers**
 - Firststar Fiber, 402-894-0003, <https://firststarrecycling.com/>
 - Mid-America Recycling, 402-476-8502, <http://www.midamericarecycling.com>
 - Recycling Enterprises, 402-421-6655, <http://www.recyclelincoln.com/>
- **Recycling Signage and Labels**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/fact-sheets/pdf/recycling-signage.pdf>
- **Tips for Reducing Commercial Waste**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/commercial/fact-sheets/pdf/waste-reduction-tips.pdf>
- **Waste Reduction and Recycling Assistance Program (WRRAP)**
<http://recycle.lincoln.ne.gov/wrrap/>

For more information about recycling and Lincoln's corrugated cardboard diversion efforts, visit recycle.lincoln.ne.gov, email recycle@lincoln.ne.gov or call the Recycling Office at 402-441-8215.