

Recycling Fact Sheet

Hospitals generate a tremendous amount of trash and end up throwing away valuable resources. Comprehensive recycling and waste minimization programs can save a health care organization both environmental and financial resources. Facilities all across the country have discovered that recycling programs can simultaneously reduce disposal costs and raise staff morale. Waste reduction strategies go beyond recycling and should emphasize waste minimization, but recycling and reuse programs are a critical aspect of any waste management and minimization program. As community health providers, hospitals should be pioneers in these important environmental programs.

In addition to recycling and reuse programs, hospitals need to focus on creating less toxic waste in the first place. For example, hospitals need to adjust their purchasing practices to favor recycled content. Not only does this help reduce the amount of pollution generated to create these products, but buying recycled also helps to stimulate the market for the hospital's recycled materials.

Only 15% of the hospital waste stream is classified 'regulated' or 'potentially infectious', and must be handled as such. The majority of hospital waste is similar to that found in an office building or hotel—mostly paper, cardboard, metal and food waste. Much of this waste can be diverted from landfills and can reduce waste disposal costs through the implementation of an aggressive recycling program.

Below is a list of materials that should be recycled in your facility:

- Batteries
 - Ni-Cad
 - Lead Acid
 - Alkaline
 - Mercuric Oxide
 - Lithium
 - Zinc Air
 - Dry Cell
 - Others
- White Office Paper
- Mixed Office Paper
- Corrugated Cardboard
- Aluminum
- Glass
- Newspaper
- Magazines
- Boxboard
- Junk Mail
- Books
- Steel Cans
- Silver
- Toner Cartridges
- Xylene
- Fluorescent Lights
- Formalin
- Overhead Transparency Film
- #1 PETE
- #2 HDPE
- #3 PVC
- #4 LPDE
- #5 PP
- #6 PS
- #7 Mixed

Implementing a hospital-wide mandatory paper recycling policy is a necessity. Hospitals can see substantial savings by diverting paper waste from the landfill, and can actually generate money from recyclers. Virtually all waste haulers have some capacity to collect recycled paper, while the few that don't can likely refer you to a recycler in the area.

Easy steps to begin a recycling program include:

- Every copier and printer should have a recycling bin placed beside it, labeled RECYCLED PAPER in large letters. There should not be trash cans nearby, but rather, kept where other types of waste are usually generated.
- Purchasing departments should order paper with a high percentage of recycled content.
- Departments should make double-sided copies where possible.
- Paper can be reused in a plain paper fax machine.
- Substitute reusable inter-office mailers in place of single-use envelopes.

It is important to remember that each area in a hospital has special needs and should be treated as an independent system. *An Ounce of Prevention: Waste Reduction Strategies for Health Care Facilities* (available through the American Hospital Association) is an excellent resource on how to implement a recycling program in your hospital, and comprehensively addresses the departmental concerns that need to be taken into consideration.

A Case Study

Albany Medical Center (AMC), a 500-bed research hospital in upstate New York has a model recycling program. The program recycled 16 million pounds of waste and saved the hospital \$4 million in its first six years. The facility is now recycling 43 percent of its total waste stream. In addition to the host of typical items it recycles, such as paper, cardboard and steel cans, AMC is able to recycle five different types of waste chemicals into usable products through the use of a \$75,000 chemical distillery it built in 1995. The distillation center can convert waste alcohol, formalin, xylene, mineral spirits and paint into pure

products that AMC can use in its labs. The distillery is expected to reduce AMC's hazardous chemical waste production from 29 tons to 6 tons and save \$250,000 per year in disposal and chemical purchasing costs.

Recycling Facts

- In a lifetime, the average American will throw away 600 times his or her adult weight in garbage. This means that each adult will leave a legacy of 90,000 lbs. of trash for his or her children.
- The five primary material industries—paper, steel, aluminum, plastics, and container glass—account for 31 percent of U.S. manufacturing energy use.
- You can make 20 cans out of recycled material with the same amount of energy it takes to make one new one.
- Enough energy is saved by recycling one aluminum can to run a TV set for three hours or to light one 100 watt bulb for 20 hours.
- In this decade, it is projected that Americans will throw away over 1 million tons of aluminum cans and foil, more than 11 million tons of glass bottles and jars, over 4 and a half million tons of office paper and nearly 10 million tons of newspaper. Almost all of this material could be recycled.
- Incinerating 10,000 tons of waste creates one job, landfilling the same amount creates 6 jobs, recycling the same 10,000 tons creates 36 jobs.
- Every Sunday, the United States wastes nearly 90% of the recyclable newspapers. This wastes about 500,000 trees.
- One tree can filter up to 60 pounds of pollutants from the air each year.



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This publication is part of *Going Green: A Resource Kit for Pollution Prevention in Health Care*. For additional copies of this or other publications included in the kit, or to find out how to get a complete kit, visit Health Care Without Harm on the Web at www.noharm.org.



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