

FACT SHEET



Food Service Waste Reduction

Today's food service establishments are constantly looking for ways to improve productivity and trim costs. Waste in any operation is generated as result of inefficiencies, and therefore, reducing waste creates a more efficient operation. Solid waste disposal, energy consumption, and wastewater make up the majority of environmental challenges that restaurants must address as part of their business operations. This fact sheet is intended to provide tips on how food service establishments can reduce, reuse, and recycle these wastes.

Benefits of Waste Reduction Programs

- **Good Business:** Generally, waste reduction leads to increased operating efficiency and cost savings. Decreased solid waste generation reduces collection and disposal costs just as reducing electricity and water reduces utility bills. Waste minimization also may reduce purchasing cost.
- **Good Stewardship:** California is challenged with maintaining its clean waters, air, and land. All Californians have a responsibility to themselves, fellow citizens, and future generations to maintain a clean environment.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** Surveys show that Americans are very concerned about the environment. They appreciate restaurants and other businesses that make efforts to be more environmentally aware - at the table and the way business is conducted.

After you implement waste reduction measures, give yourself credit! Your efforts will not only attract customers, they will encourage other businesses to follow your example.

Implementing a Waste Reduction Program

Once a restaurant has made a commitment to reduce waste, the manager or waste reduction team should assess all operations, such as food preparation, food service, purchasing, and janitorial activities to identify opportunities to reduce waste and conserve water and electricity. Ideas for protecting the environment and realizing the cost benefits of waste reduction should be responsibilities of all employees in all job functions. Once waste reduction opportunities are identified, employees should be trained so they are comfortable with implementing the changes. Training should be repeated periodically to ensure that new employees are included. An employee suggestion and awards program can be established to maintain enthusiasm for the program. The remainder of this fact sheet lists specific activities that restaurants can undertake to reduce waste.

Reduction and Reuse

- Avoid over-packaging for take-out orders.
- Place health department approved rubber mats around bus and dish washing stations to reduce china and glass breakage.
- Work with suppliers to take back and reuse corrugated cardboard boxes, five-gallon buckets, and other packaging - if they will not take them back, donate buckets to customers, local schools, or churches. Do not reuse for contact with food.
- Use approved refillable condiment bottles (only after being rewashed and sanitized) instead of single-use packages. Refill them from bulk containers.

- Use reusable dishes instead of Styrofoam or other disposable ware to save on long-term purchasing costs.
- Use reusable take-home trays for regular customers.
- For take-out orders, offer condiments and straws upon request instead of self-serve.
- For dining customers, use bulk straw dispensers instead of individually wrapped straws, and place napkin dispensers on tables rather than in the central part of the dining room—people will generally take 1/3 as many napkins.
- Reduce menu printing costs where possible, for example, by reusing menus, eliminating paper inserts, and using boards to post daily specials.
- Ask your carbonated beverage supplier to provide you with reusable syrup canisters rather than the bag-in-the box type of containers.
- Use roll-type paper towels (unbleached are usually cheapest) in restrooms instead of using pre-cut paper towels.
- Train employees on the proper use of cleaning agents for concentrates, and test for proper concentration. Most people use significantly more concentrate than is required to do the job.

Recycling

- Establish glass, plastic, and cardboard recycling with a local collector.
- Share the cost of a cardboard baler for recycling with neighboring business.
- Make sure that staff is flattening tin and aluminum cans to reduce volume before placing in recycling bins.

Purchasing

- Choose environmentally friendly cleaning products, and try to purchase cleaning agents in concentrate.
- Ask for and purchase products such as paper towels, toilet tissue, menus, order pads, cash register tapes, plastic bags, dish trays, rubber mats, brooms, and benches made from recycled materials.

Electricity Conservation

- Develop and implement a cleaning and maintenance program for all equipment. This program should include calibrating ovens and checking pipes for leaks.

- Use energy-conserving fluorescent lights instead of the more common high-wattage bulbs.
- Use low-wattage bulbs in exit signs instead of the more common high-wattage bulbs.
- Clean refrigerator coils and change air conditioning filters regularly to help these appliances run more efficiently.
- Install motion or timer lights in restrooms, pantries, and freezer units. Lights can be set to go off after three to five minutes of inactivity.
- Set thermostats at reasonable levels.

Water Conservation

- Clean spills with a squeegee, broom, or vacuum.
- Install low-flow faucet adapters, and/or automatic turnoff faucets, and low-flow toilets in restrooms. Of the total water used in restaurants, restroom water usage ranges from 50 percent in full-service restaurants to 80 percent in fast food restaurants.
- Never hose material down the drain. This practice not only wastes water, but it contributes to organic loading at the wastewater treatment plant.
- Provide drinking water to customers only upon request.
- Replace rubber faucet gaskets with brass gaskets and automatic shut off nozzles to save thousands of gallons/year.

Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) Waste Management

The National Restaurant Association estimates that 20 percent of all food prepared commercially in the United States goes to waste, and grease is responsible for a large percentage of all sewer overflows in the country. The best way to manage FOG is to keep it out of the sewer system by using Best Management Practices (BMPs). BMPs are activities, prohibitions of practices, maintenance procedures, and other management practices that reduce the discharge of FOG from the wastewater discharge. For details, see Fact Sheet for Best Management Practices for Fats, Oils, and Grease.

Waste reduction offers cost savings that benefit both small and large operations. Once your waste reduction program is underway, track your waste reduction, cost savings, and get the word out! You do not have to do it all at once - choose actions that are doable, document your success, and then move on to the harder projects.