

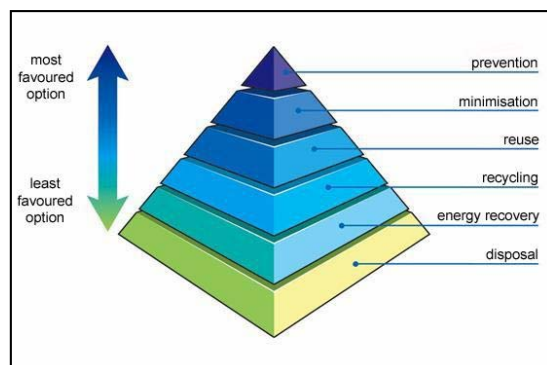
Waste Minimisation & Recycling @ work

Don't Waste Waste

In many ways our phrase “Don't Waste Waste” perfectly encapsulates the essence of Yorwaste's business going forward. Waste is a valuable commodity and as more businesses and organisations consider the effects of their activities on the environment, waste generated at work is increasingly receiving attention. More and more, the production of waste is seen as a form of inefficiency and misuse of resources, which has both economic and environmental implications for individual companies and the country as a whole.

Waste Prevention & Minimisation

In any definition of the waste management hierarchy, waste prevention and minimisation comes right at the top. Both environmentally and economically it makes no sense to produce items which are not necessary and which rapidly become waste. Consuming less is the most fundamental step in moving towards a more sustainable society and in reducing waste, however, since it involves fundamental changes in attitude, it is a much more difficult thing to achieve, and to measure, than recycling.



Waste Audits

An important step in instituting a waste minimisation programme is to conduct an audit to measure the usage of consumables, and the types and amount of waste produced. It provides a baseline from which to measure the effectiveness of the programme. This can be very significant in terms of motivation, as many waste minimisation measures seem, on the face of it, to be quite trivial. The results, though, are cumulative, and often quite startling.

The basic role of a waste audit is to identify the what, where and how of waste generation. It should include both the nature and amount of waste, and its cost to the company. As well as providing a benchmark by which to measure the success of waste minimisation procedures, it will identify opportunities for implementing such procedures. A waste audit should:

- Identify all points at which waste is generated
- Identify the origin of each type of waste
- Monitor the waste to identify its quantity and type, and its environmental effects
- Establish methods of measuring the waste for monitoring purposes
- Identify the costs of the current disposal methods, including treatment, handling, storage and transport. Identify any wastes which are hazardous and consider how they can be separated from the main waste stream, or replaced with a non-hazardous product.
- Look at opportunities to reduce, recycle or re-use the waste
- Set targets for reducing waste

Setting up a successful office recycling scheme

The essence of a successful office recycling scheme is simple - to collect together a sufficient quantity of a particular type of waste material, and find a merchant to take it away. However, in practice there are often problems to be overcome, and advance planning is essential, to ensure a scheme's success in a large company setting up a pilot scheme, on a modest scale, is a valuable first step which should enable problems to be eliminated at an early stage in particular, the four 'C's need to be addressed - communication, consultation, cooperation, coordination, as a successful recycling scheme will need to involve all the staff of the company

- **Communication** will be needed in a number of areas - between staff and management, between the company and merchants, between office staff and cleaning staff, and between the coordinator or coordinating team and other staff. Once established, the scheme will need to be built into induction programmes for new staff
- **Consultation** - there will be things to be found out and discussed before setting up the scheme.
- **Cooperation** - everyone needs to do their bit effectively for it to work, particularly in the sorting out of waste, such as types of waste paper
- **Coordination** - a scheme will need one person or a team (the Green Team/Eco-team etc), depending on company size, to set it up devise communication systems, provide feedback, and measure its effectiveness



Involving everyone in everything

Communication amongst employees is vital for the success of waste minimisation schemes. Internal newsletters, presentations, stickers and posters are ways of communicating new initiatives and the progress of projects to staff in large organisations. It should be clear who are the people coordinating such schemes, and they need to be accessible to all staff. Leading by example will also help communicate the waste minimisation message to employees. One example is to develop a small system within the organisation to cut down on paper usage. Some of the cost savings resulting from reducing waste could be passed on to a charity chosen by the staff, to strengthen their motivation.

Green procurement - buy recycled

The word "recycling" is often used to mean the return of materials to be recycled, via bottle banks, waste paper collections etc. However, this is only the first stage of the process. The collected materials have to be sorted and cleaned, then reprocessed and, finally, manufactured into new items which can be sold.

Recycling, therefore, involves all four stages - collection, sorting, manufacturing and purchasing. Unless all four stages take place, recycling will not work. If markets do not exist for the collected material, it piles up, often at great expense, and cannot be used. The final stage, purchasing of recycled products, is vital for recycling to be economic and for recycling schemes, including those from offices, to be successful. By 'closing the loop' through purchasing office products made partially or wholly from reclaimed materials, we can ensure that the market for waste materials from offices remains strong and office recycling schemes will flourish.

Disposables vs. long life products

There are many products which are designed for single or short life usage which are commonly found in the office or workplace. Examples include non-refillable ball-point pens, marker pens, plastic cups and cutlery, plastic pots for single portions of milk, disposable wiping cloths, paper towels and metal staples. All these products require raw materials and energy for their production, and resources to deal with their disposal, each process producing environmental impacts. In many instances longer life products can be substituted, sometimes through new products, such as refillable marker pens, or low energy light bulbs, which last as long as eight standard bulbs Paper clips and staples can be replaced by a new type of stapler which does not use metal staples. In other instances, organisational changes may enable long life products such as real mugs, to be used in place of disposable cups

Use your purchasing power to improve waste minimisation

Although much can be done to minimise waste and encourage reuse at an individual or departmental level, there are instances where the purchasing strategy of the whole company needs to be involved This will most probably form part of a broader environmental management policy. For example, there may be more scope for buying in bulk to reduce packaging if this is instituted as company policy. Transit packaging may be reused, particularly if the deliveries are regular, or are within the same company

What is a recycled product?

One of the problems of buying recycled products is the lack of consistency in the definitions used. "Recycled" does not necessarily mean that a product has been made from 100% recovered materials. There are many terms connected with recycled products which it is helpful to know, and which will enable purchasing specifications to be drawn up with a fair degree of accuracy. Recycled means that the product contains some materials which have been recovered, or previously manufactured. Recovered materials may include both pre- and post- consumer use materials. Post-consumer materials are items that have been used, such as corrugated containers, office paper, pallets, drums, bottles and printed papers, and which are collected through office, commercial and household recycling schemes. Pre-consumer materials are those that result from waste produced during the manufacturing process, such as trimmings, off-cuts and damaged produce. These may also be referred to as 'post-industrial' waste. So a "recycled" product could be made from 100% post-consumer waste, but, equally it might contain only 25% pre-consumer waste and 75% virgin material. In addition to recycling waste materials back into similar products, there are many products in which waste is used to manufacture a radically different product. Waste newsprint is recycled into loft insulation. Old tyres are recycled into carpet underlay and porous hose pipes. Mixed plastic is used to manufacture a wood substitute. The imbalance between supply of collected waste material and its traditional uses is prompting more imaginative uses of reclaimed materials, with new products appearing all the time.

Finding recycled products

Many everyday purchases already contain significant amounts of reclaimed material. In some instances the performance of the material is unaffected by the recycled content, for example the use of recovered aluminium in beverage cans and glass in jars and bottles. The purchaser is unaware of the presence of reclaimed material and needs to make no conscious effort to select a particular product. Other frequently used items regularly containing reclaimed materials are relatively low grade items such as cardboard boxes and brown envelopes. Before waste became a matter of general concern the inclusion of recycled material in such items was not publicised, and it may still not be evident. Checking with your supplier should provide some information as to what extent items currently purchased include reclaimed content, its percentage and source - pre- or post-consumer waste. In other situations it will be necessary to specify that your company wishes to use products which are recycled, for example with photocopier or printing papers. There are companies which specialise in providing technical information on recycled office products, particular paper, and also specialised suppliers of office products for the environmentally conscious office, which sell products containing recycled material. Many regular office supply companies also carry product lines with recycled content in their catalogues. Many printers are now offering recycled paper as an option and it is worth talking with your regular printer when ordering letterheads and other stationery before looking elsewhere. www.recycledproducts.org.uk is a website with details of recycled products to help you with your purchasing.

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