



Office Paper Recycling

The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 41 percent of solid waste is paper. In an office, paper, including newspapers, magazines, packages, boxboard, paper bags and all other grades of paper, can make up to 80 percent of the solid waste.

One potential means of handling this material is through recycling. Why recycle office paper? Consider an office paper recycling program an opportunity to:

- obtain revenue from sale of computer and high grade white paper;
- lower waste disposal costs;
- create a good public image;
- conserve trees;
- reduce air, water and land pollution; and
- extend the life of landfills.

What Paper Is Recyclable?

Paper dealers will provide their guidelines and restrictions for what papers they will accept and how they want the paper prepared (e.g., level of foreign matter (called contaminants), volume, containers, etc.)

The grades of office paper for recycling include:

- Computer print-out (high grade): color barred or blank. Commercial forms or primers' inks are usually not acceptable.
- White ledger (high grade): non-glossy, printed or unprinted white, including letterhead, typing, writing and copy machine paper.
- Colored ledger: non-glossy, printed or unprinted colored paper.
- Mixed office paper (lower grade): unsorted paper including: office paper; manila folders; white, colored and glossy paper; junk mail; tabulating cards; pamphlets; brochures. This mix does not include: newsprint, phone books, magazines, Pendaflex or brown Kraft envelopes.
- Groundwood computer paper (low grade): looks like phone book paper.
- Corrugated cardboard (low grade).

Paper that is not usually recyclable (confirm this with each specific recycler or program coordinator) includes: brown Kraft envelopes, blueprint paper, paper with food contamination, newspaper, phone books and magazines. The most commonly recycled papers are computer paper, white ledger paper, colored ledger paper and mixed office paper. Mixing paper grades usually drops the price of all the paper to the price of the lowest grade included in the mix.

Having individuals separate one or two paper types is the maximum workable in most office environments. One reliable separation is ideal. Let's examine how an office paper recycling program can be started.



Starting A Program

It is important to have a program coordinator who is enthusiastic, organized and has both time and knowledge of the office operation. This person will not only be a key in the start-up phase, but also vital to the ongoing success of the program.

Conduct Initial Research

First, you will need to determine how much paper and the kinds of paper your office has. There is a basic formula for recycled paper generation: multiply the number of employees by 0.5 lbs. (recyclable paper/employee/day). This will be the total recyclable paper/day. Multiply this pounds of paper per day by 240 (working days/year); divide by 12 (months per year). This figure is then divided by 2000 (lbs/ ton) to equal the total tons recyclable paper/month.

$$(\# \text{ Employees} \times 0.5 \times 240/12)/2000$$

To determine potential paper recovery rates, tons of recyclable paper/month (the figure from above) is multiplied by 65 percent (or the estimated employee participation rate) to equal tons/month recyclable paper recovered.

$$\text{Tons/paper/month} \times .65 = \text{T/month recovered}$$

Several random samples of trash cans will help you determine the kinds of paper the office generates.

Design a Collection and Storage System

In addition to trash containers, you should have marked containers at each person's desk or work station for initial collection. Recycling containers in the lunch room, conference room and work areas may also be valuable, depending on the types of paper collected. A convenient central collection location on each floor or wing should be established; One that meets fire and safety (code) regulations. Janitorial services may initially help with collection or the task may need to be added to the next janitorial contract. Proceeds from the recycling program can be used to hire a student or handicapped person to handle removal of the paper. Janitorial services must be included in all stages of the program whether they are involved in the actual collection or not. Government offices may need to check their salvage guidelines to determine where proceeds from the recycled paper must go.

Employee Education

Before the program officially begins, start the awareness efforts for employees. Circulate a memo from the office executive and program coordinator about starting a recycling program and invite participation in planning. Remember to keep the program easy. Locate containers at work stations and let everyone know what paper to recycle and what to put in the trash. Signs on the containers stating what is acceptable



are useful. Good signage is mandatory for central collection areas. Many guidebooks recommend having a "kick-off" event to initiate the program.

One good educational effort is to make everyone aware of the benefits of the program. Keep employees involved with updates, newsletters and/or posters. Train new employees as part of their orientation.

Other Things You Can Do

Reduction of paper waste is as important as recycling. Use both sides of each piece of paper. Circulate memos rather than copies for everyone or use electronic mail or bulletin boards. Use the smallest amount of paper necessary for the message. Reuse copy machine paper as note pads. Institute a central filing system to reduce the need for multiple file copies. Purchase only paper that can be recycled (colored paper is not as valuable). Emphasize the importance of purchasing recycled paper products. Use reusable items such as washable coffee mugs, dishes and cloth towels. The list of ideas is limited only by your imagination.

Recycled Paper Facts

Pre-consumer waste is waste generated from the manufacturing and processing of paper and paper products. It does not include waste material normally reused within the same company.

Post-consumer waste is waste generated by a business or consumer that has served its intended end-use and has been diverted into the waste stream. Both types of recycled fiber are used in recycled content paper, and both contribute to the reduction of waste.

Keys To Success

- Capable and enthusiastic program coordinator.
- Secure market for recyclable paper.
- Simple, reliable collection system.
- Effective employee education and publicity program.
- Qualified, reliable and full-service paper recycling company.
- Committed management team.