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“How to start recycling at work”

If you own or pay for a dumpster at your business, you are probably tired of paying the invoice for having it emptied. Imagine reducing your annual waste disposal costs by 50-60%. Your dumpster is probably overflowing with cardboard right now. There is no sense in paying someone to haul it to a landfill. Maybe you are an employee of someone else who pays for the trash disposal at work, and you never see the overflowing trash containers. Maybe you do see them, and you would like to do something about it. It's not always about saving money for your boss...in my case it was about the environment.

You've heard the phrase: “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.” The office or workplace is the perfect place to put the well-known phrase into practice. Reduce: Encourage employees or coworkers to print documents double-sided. Consider revising fax settings so as not to print a confirmation page. Reuse: Provided reusable cups and mugs for employees to use, rather than Styrofoam cups. This is also a good way to save money. Make it an office policy to purchase products with 100% recycled content, or as much recycled content as possible. Recycle: Make recycling as easy and convenient as possible. Provide individual office paper bins to employees to use at their desks. Place larger office paper recycling bins near copiers, mail slots/boxes, etc.

Here are a few tips to get recycling started at work. First, gather the facts. Assess the discards: figure out the amounts and types of materials that are recoverable or recyclable. Target materials for recycling: identify the materials that are most abundant in the waste stream and would be the easiest to separate for recovery. Talk to your recycler: that would be me. I implemented recycling in my real estate office, and have lots of ideas. If you lease, the building owners or management company may already contract with the recycler. Smaller companies may consider drop-off recycling.

Once you have a plan, it's time to design a program. First, get management support: arm yourself with information and data that shows program value or identifies a need to improve an existing recycling program. Target the decision-maker: Make the program happen by focusing on costs, impact on productivity, staffing, environmental benefits, and positive public relations. Have one individual responsible for the program, with company leader support. Organize collection procedures: To increase participation and the quality of recyclables, consider the following: containers, collection locations (one common area for every 15-20 employees), signage, employee participation, and custodial staff. Once these are in place, you will need to train and coach employees. Be a resource for recycling questions and train yourself to change computer settings for double-sided printing. If possible, organize recycling teams, identify “recycling champions” or employees that are enthusiastic about recycling, to help encourage other employees to recycle.

In order to keep the program strong, you can do several things: have recycling challenges: Set up recycling teams among departments, floors, or company divisions. Organize competitions to determine which team is recycling the most. This will help spread the word about the program and generate enthusiasm. Include information in employee orientation materials; include recycling information in the company web site, newsletter, company-wide voice mails, or other internal communication. Remember to make it fun, make adjustments as necessary, get employee input, set achievable goals, and include everyone. Lastly, announce your recycling program to the local community, showing them the company's commitment to the environment.

Please contact me if you would like advice about setting up recycling in your workplace, or if you have questions about the materials we accept here at the Isabella County Recycling Center, 4208 E River Rd, Mt. Pleasant. I can be reached at (989) 773-9631 or email at: recycling@isabellacounty.org. Recycling in the workplace is easier than you might think. I have lots of ideas and can brainstorm with you. Happy Recycling!

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