Seven Steps to Start A Business Waste Reduction Program

Today, waste disposal is just one of the many costs of doing business. Companies have seen a dramatic increase in the complexities and costs of waste disposal. As a result, more businesses are finding that waste reduction is an essential waste management method that can actually save money while having a beneficial environmental effect.

Waste reduction includes recycling, reuse and waste prevention (preventing waste from happening in the first place). Employees can prevent large amounts of waste each day by making informed choices.

The following steps will help your business implement a waste reduction program.

#1 Obtain Management Support
Employee involvement is as important as management support and should be initiated as soon as a team is chosen. Education and training should be ongoing in your program, as success will depend on staff participation. The team can decide the best way to motivate and educate the staff - newsletters, electronic mail, training sessions, posters, contests, orientation. Management can assure that waste reduction training and education become part of every employee’s job. You’ll find that your employees become the most enthusiastic and creative participants!

#2 Implement the Plan
Management approval and support are essential for the success of a waste reduction program. Management needs to sign on from the beginning, be kept informed of all policies and changes, and communicate to employees their ongoing commitment.

#3 Select a Reduction Team and/or Leader
Waste reduction programs are most successful when an enthusiastic team leads the program. Depending upon your company’s size, select a volunteer from the following departments: purchasing, custodial, maintenance, manufacturing and administration. If your company is too small for a team, select one or two leaders who are committed to the program. The program leader or team manages the program and acts as a liaison with management, employees, maintenance staff and recycling vendor representatives.

#4 Evaluate Your Waste Stream
Before you can begin to recycle or reduce the amount of waste you generate, you need to know what you are throwing away. A waste stream evaluation identifies the composition, quantity and percentage of materials in your waste stream. Waste evaluations can be as simple as looking in employee garbage cans or in the building dumpster. You may perform a detailed waste analysis by sorting garbage into categories and weighing and measuring each material type. The more time spent evaluating the waste, the more you will know about what materials may be targeted for reduction and recycling. Mecklenburg County has forms to help you analyze your waste.
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#5
Develop a Plan
Now that you’ve analyzed your waste, you need to develop a plan. You’ll want to consider a number of options for your materials. What can be recycled? What items can be reused? Are there alternative products that are repairable or more durable? Will purchasing in bulk or concentrates reduce waste and cost? What products can be purchased that are made from recycled materials? The team needs to involve management in this step as policies and purchasing methods may have to change. The team should also solicit staff suggestions. In addition to options, the plan should set realistic goals and schedules. Mecklenburg County has business specific information that can help design programs for different business types.

#6
Involve and Educate Employees
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#7
Implement the Plan
It’s time to begin implementation. Some steps can be started immediately. Others will be phased in. If your program is complex, implement it gradually so employees are not overwhelmed by procedure changes. A pilot program may identify any operational problems in the early stages. Remember to include employee education throughout implementation. It’s crucial!

#8
Evaluate and Adjust
Once the program is underway, the team should evaluate its effectiveness to determine if goals are being met. Do your first evaluation after the program is fully established - as early as one month or as late as six to eight months. It’s important to keep accurate records and documentation so that you have the information you need to evaluate the effect of new products, different vendors and new systems. Remember to inform employees about any changes you make...and especially keep them updated on the program’s progress and success.

The Mecklenburg County Waste Reduction staff is available to help you with any of these steps. Call (704) 432-3200 for consultation, information and assistance.