

Your guide to successful recycling at work

Your blueprint for optimum recycling rates
within corporate offices & facilities

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Introduction

Why recycle in the workplace?

Save money

General waste collections can cost twice as much as recycling collections, so by increasing your recycling rates, you can significantly reduce your waste collection costs.

Also, by switching from bins under every desk to having centralised recycling stations, you can make your cleaners' job far easier and quicker, which can save you further labour costs.

Demonstrate your organisation's commitment to sustainability

In today's world, the pressure put on large corporations to improve their environmental footprint is huge. Through the power of social media, not only the general public but your customers, stakeholders & staff are demanding more action to support the environment, reduce your carbon footprint, and contribute towards a circular economy.

Implementing an effective recycling system can be a great way to show that your company cares about sustainability and the environment.



Introduction

Improve your company culture & boost employee engagement

It's been proven many times that a good corporate responsibility scheme can actually boost employee engagement. Studies have shown that by empowering your employees to be able to make a positive impact on the environment, you can not only improve your organisation's sustainability, but also have more engaged employees and a better company culture.

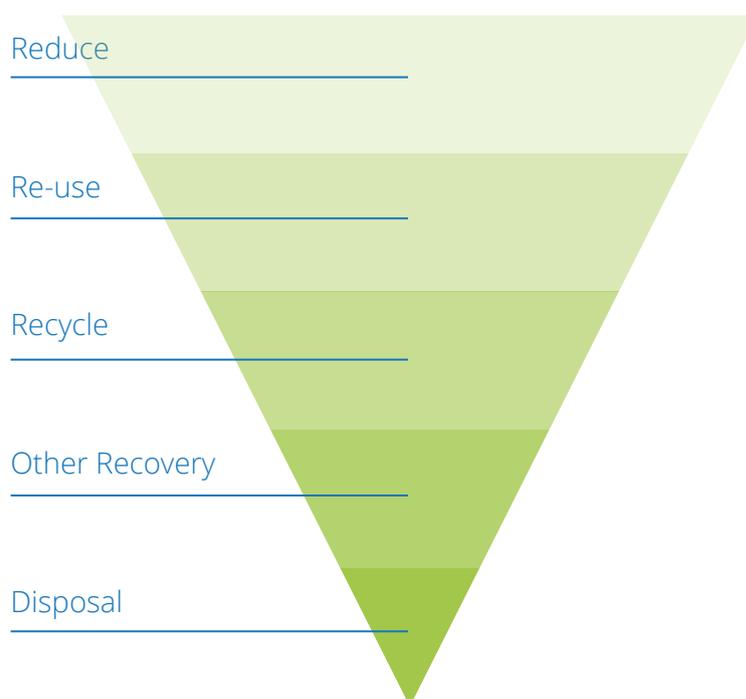


Preserve the planet for our future generations

This really goes without saying, but the more your company can recycle, the more waste you are diverting from landfill. This means you are not only contributing to reducing the harmful greenhouse gases these landfill sites emit, but you're also reducing the need for extracting and processing raw materials, which is an extremely high-energy process.

What is the hierarchy of waste?

Using the hierarchy of waste is a great way to prioritise how to reduce your waste, working towards being a zero-waste facility. Start by reducing the amount of waste you produce in the first place, and working down the hierarchy, you will minimise the negative impact your waste has on the environment.



Reduce – Reducing your waste volume and the impact it has on the environment

Re-use – Re-using waste products without any other processing

Recycle – Sending your waste to be processed into other materials & products

Other Recovery – Sending your waste to be used to produce energy or fuels

Disposal – The last resort – Sending your waste to landfill

Optimising your recycling solutions

Refreshing your recycling systems can get costly, so it's important to ensure that you get the most out of a new system, without breaking the bank.

What type of bins do I need?

We always recommend keeping all your waste streams in one station and using the same stations throughout your facility. This way, staff can easily recycle the same waste in the same way wherever they are in your facility, and they will instantly recognise every recycling station across the office.

Keeping the waste streams in one place will also give you much better recycling rates, as employees will always have the option to recycle their waste wherever they are, and it will always be as easy to recycle waste as otherwise.

Keeping all the waste in one station also makes your cleaners' job easier, quicker and more efficient.



What waste streams do I need?

The first thing to consider here is what waste streams your waste broker collects.

Obviously, if you only have general waste & mixed recycling collected, there's no point in spending money on a recycling scheme that segregates recycling into 5 separate streams. If you want to segregate your waste better than you are currently, then the first thing to do is talk to your waste broker, or maybe even find a new one. Once these back-of-house processes are set up, it's time to start thinking about how to effectively segregate the waste front-of-house. You may even consider using multiple waste brokers; for example, a separate collection for food waste.

That being said, we do see a lot of trends in recycling segregation. The most common configuration of waste streams is food waste, general waste, and mixed recycling. More and more offices now are also recycling coffee cups, as the technology and facilities to do this are improving rapidly. We also see a lot of liquid collection; this is especially useful if you're segregating coffee cups, as these are often not fully emptied. Another common waste stream is confidential waste – many offices have a partnership with a confidential shredding company.



Making recycling easy & decreasing contamination

What signage do I need?

It's the signage that can make or break the success of a recycling scheme. This needs to be given careful consideration, especially if you're starting to recycle more or different waste streams than before. So here are 3 pointers to help you set up the most effective signage possible, thereby increasing your recycling rates & decreasing general waste collection costs.



Keep it concise

It may be tempting to have long lists of what can & can't go in each waste stream, thinking that this makes it very clear to staff what goes where. In reality, however, staff are unlikely to read every word, and the really important information can get lost in the noise. It's usually more effective to use as little text as possible, combined with symbols, to get the message across clearly. We've even created stations with display boxes containing actual examples of what goes in each waste stream so your staff don't need to read any text at all!

Making recycling easy & decreasing contamination

Make it specific

If there are certain items that your staff are repeatedly disposing of incorrectly, then just a little more information about each waste stream could go a long way. For example, if employees are putting food in the mixed recycling stream, you may want something saying 'no food' on your general waste aperture. If you can solve problems specific to your office, this will go a long way toward eliminating contaminated recyclable waste.

Make it as clear as possible

Everything about the design of your recycling scheme should be designed to make recycling as easy as possible for your staff, thereby increasing recycling rates & reducing contamination.

We recommend colour-coding the waste streams to make things as clear as possible. Where possible, use the WRAP colours for waste streams. The Waste Resource Action Program (WRAP) is a governing body which seeks to standardise waste recycling across the country, by using standard colours, symbols & signage. You'll recognise these symbols & colours from your household recycling, especially at your local civic amenity centre. These waste streams won't always perfectly translate into how you recycle at work, but by using the colours & symbols where possible, you'll make it easier for staff to identify waste streams.



Making recycling easy & decreasing contamination

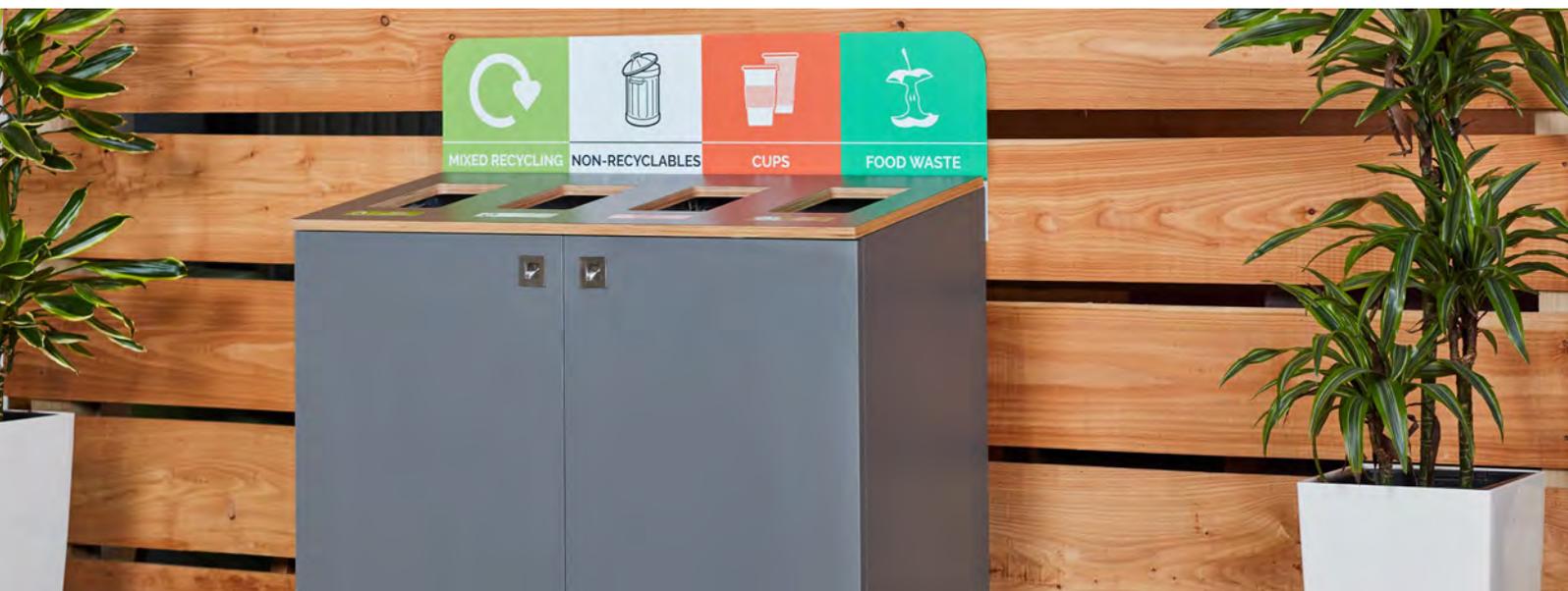
How many recycling stations do I need?

It all depends on the type of office you have. An office with a higher density of people, such as a call centre, will certainly need more bins than an say a design studio with 25 people. You'll also need to consider the waste type & volume of waste your office creates. For example, some waste, such as empty drinks bottles & cans, will fill up a bin a lot quicker than paper waste. for example.

However, there are some approximate rules of thumb to go by:

1. Nobody should be more than 10-15 steps away from a recycling point.
2. One recycling station should serve about 30-35 people.

These rules certainly aren't hard and fast, but they'll give you a good steer.



Engaging employees in recycling

A well-designed recycling solution will only go so far. If your employees aren't engaged in your recycling scheme, they won't buy into it, and your recycling rates will suffer. A successful recycling campaign must be designed with staff engagement in mind. So here are a few pointers to get your staff to buy into your plans.

Make it simple

Don't overcomplicate things. Recycling can be complicated, so keep your system as straightforward as you possibly can. You might think that splitting your waste into multiple waste streams will improve your recycling rates, but this can often lead to confusion among staff instead.



Make it fun

You might not have thought it possible, but recycling can be fun! By injecting something playful and interesting into your recycling, you will naturally engage more staff. For some inspiration on how to make recycling fun, check out some of the work by Hubbub, an environmental charity. They've run several campaigns designed to encourage recycling & reduce littering among the general public, and each one is designed to engage people in a fun & quirky way.

Engaging employees in recycling

Incentivise staff

The age-old 'carrot for the donkey' technique. By using reverse vending machines, you can reward your employees for doing the right thing. These machines allow you to set up an incentive system which can reward employees with anything from a discount at the staff restaurant to a donation to charity.



What does successful recycling look like in a corporate office facility?

Different facilities may recycle more of different things. For example, some offices recycle coffee cups, but some don't get through enough of them to make it worthwhile. So the percentages of recycled waste may vary significantly.

A good guide is that if all waste is correctly segregated, mixed recycling should take up 75-95% waste volume compared to general waste. This figure is based on office waste only. When waste from canteens & washrooms are included, the proportion of general waste often goes up, especially if food waste is not recycled.

So if your recycling levels are below this, then your first priority should be improving this. If your levels of mixed recycling are already good, then there's plenty more you can do.



Monitoring results

Continuously improving

Even if you send zero waste to landfill, there's likely to still be room for improvement. If you remember the hierarchy of waste, your first priority should be to reduce the amount of waste you produce. In this sector alone, you can always improve: reducing your paper usage, phasing out single-use bottles & cups, switching from disposable cutlery & dishes in the canteen, reducing the package on staff lunches – the list is endless.

However even when just sticking to recycling, there's still always room for improvement.

New waste streams

If your mixed recycling rates are already high, then it could be time to look at recycling more waste. For example, set up a coffee cup waste stream, have your food waste collected, introduce recycling of more types of plastic, or even set up very specific waste streams, such as coffee grounds or electrical items.



Monitoring results

Continuous investment in improvement

The reality is that to keep improving your recycling, you'll need to keep investing in better recycling solutions. Whether that be more or better waste stations, more waste streams collected, or ensuring that your waste is all diverted from landfill, successful recycling is likely to involve some investment. Being prepared and willing for this is important in continuous recycling improvement. However, bear in mind that the most expensive waste collection is for general waste. As more tariffs are placed on waste sent to landfill, the expense of recycling is only going to go down, and the cost of doing nothing is only going to increase.

The ultimate goal

As you strive to continuously improve your recycling & waste management, don't lose sight of the bigger picture. The guiding principle behind all your efforts should be the hierarchy of waste. Never forget that recycling should always be your third option after reducing your waste volume and re-using waste products. If you find that there's a certain item that you're putting a lot of into general waste, remember that the first question to ask yourself is; 'can I reduce the amount of this waste I produce, or stop it altogether?'. Then see if you can re-use it in some way, then consider if it's recyclable. Only when you start thinking like this will you really make an impact on your waste's carbon footprint.

Your move next...

Hopefully this guide has helped you. For more information, or to chat with one of our experts, feel free to contact us.

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