



# Recycling and Waste Reduction in the Restaurant Industry



From leftover food to packaging and even kitchen supplies, restaurants in Wisconsin produce a lot of waste. Many of these businesses have found that simple steps toward reducing the amount of waste they produce and increasing the amount they recycle can have a big impact on waste disposal costs. Recycling and reuse programs reduce waste, save money and promote an environmentally friendly image for your restaurant.



## Why Recycle and Reduce Waste?

**To save resources:** Recycling saves valuable reusable resources and reduces the energy use and pollution associated with extracting and manufacturing virgin materials.

**To reduce costs:** Like other businesses in Wisconsin, restaurants pay for waste disposal. In many cases, recycling services cost significantly less than waste disposal; companies that reuse or recycle more waste can save significant costs. Reusing more materials can also reduce purchasing and handling costs.

**To improve customer service:** Recycling demonstrates your business' commitment to environmental protection. A recent survey indicates over 95% of Wisconsin citizens recycle regularly. Offering recycling is just another way to better serve your customers.

## What Should Be Recycled in Wisconsin?

- Aluminum, glass, steel (tin) and bi-metal containers
- Plastic containers #1 and #2, including milk jugs and detergent, soda and water bottles
- Magazines, catalogs and other materials printed on similar paper
- Newspaper and office paper
- Corrugated cardboard
- Computers, televisions, desktop printers, computer peripherals, DVD players, VCRs, digital video recorders, fax machines and phones with video displays.
- Major appliances including air conditioners, clothes washers and dryers, dishwashers, refrigerators, freezers, stoves, ovens, dehumidifiers, furnaces, boilers and water heaters
- Yard waste, including grass clippings, leaves, yard and garden debris
- Lead acid vehicle batteries, automotive waste oils and waste tires
- Used oil filters

## Designing Your Recycling and Waste Reduction

### 1. Enlist management and employee support

Your employees will be a large factor in ensuring your program's success. Get them involved, informed and on board early in the process. Get support and policy directives from management that allow you to:

- **Use staff time and resources.**
- **Integrate the program** into company procedures.



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- **Incorporate recycling/waste reduction responsibilities** into employee job duties and new employee training.
- **Involve staff/employees in the decision making process.** If you manage a large restaurant, set up a waste reduction and recycling team.

### 2. Understand your waste

Recycling helps the environment by recovering valuable resources and turning them into new products we use every day. Before you start your recycling program, conduct an audit of your company's waste. Look through all trash bins for several weeks. List the types and weights of items customers and staff throw away. Look for materials that are:



- **Present in significant quantities.**
- **Relatively free of contamination (food, glue, etc.).**
- **Easily separated from other materials.**

### 3. Develop your recycling program

Once you have characterized your waste stream, work with your staff to determine the items the restaurant can recycle, reduce, reuse or eliminate. Some common recyclables in a restaurant setting include:



- Computer paper
- Cardboard boxes
- Newspaper
- Paper bags
- Aluminum and steel cans
- Plastic and glass beverage containers
- #1 and #2 plastic containers
- Copier and printer cartridges
- Wood pallets
- Food waste

Start your program on a small scale. Choose materials that are easily recyclable and that your restaurant produces a lot of. Once you have a successful recycling program, it's easy to add additional materials.

### 4. Set up your collection system

A clearly set up, easy-to-use collection system will help you capture more of your recyclables. When setting up your system:



- **Place recycling bins in easy-to-access areas of your kitchen, office and storage areas.**
- **Use trash and recycling bins that look different from one another and are clearly marked.** Signs with photos or images of recyclables placed above your recycling containers can help your staff know what should be recycled.
- **Place trash and recycling bins next to one another where possible.**

### 5. Educate and motivate employees

Your employees will be a large factor in ensuring your program's success. Take time to educate staff on what should and should not be recycled. Hold an all-staff meeting to go over how your system works and answer any questions. Make recycling part of all new staff training.



### 6. Evaluate your program

After your program has had some time to get established, evaluate your success and make adjustments. Work with your staff and waste hauler to identify problems or opportunities for improvement. Ask your hauler for information on:



- **How much of each material** is being collected.
  - **Quality of materials collected and any contamination issues.** Work to correct these issues.
  - **Costs/savings** associated with your recycling program.
- Share program successes with your employees and let them know how much waste they are preventing!



"Offering recycling is just another way to better serve your customers."

## Waste reduction and recycling ideas and suggestions

Restaurants can reduce their waste and expenses through a variety of waste reduction and recycling activities. The following ideas originate from tried-and-true restaurant programs. Choose suggestions that would be practical for you:



### Packaging

- **Request products with a minimal amount of packaging** from your suppliers. Ask them to look out for other products with minimal packaging.
- **Ask your suppliers to reuse or recycle shipping boxes, pallets, bins, etc.**
- **Buy beverages in concentrate or bulk form.**
- **Buy shelf-stable food supplies in bulk** whenever sales volume and storage space justify it. This minimizes unnecessary packaging and may reduce costs.
- **Minimize unnecessary packaging** (e.g., double wrapping, double bagging) of take-out food.
- **Offer customers a discount if they bring in reusable "doggie bags"** (e.g., plastic containers).

### Dinnerware and kitchen supplies

- **Purchase products made from recycled materials.** For example, anti-fatigue mats made from recycled tires and paper products (napkins, paper toweling and toilet paper) made from postconsumer recycled paper.
- **Use reusable coasters or nothing at all.**
- **Use reusable table linen and dinnerware.**
- **In kitchen areas, use cloth towels rather than paper.**
- **Have employees use reusable mugs or cups for their drinks.**

### Cleaning supplies and restaurant infrastructure

- **Purchase multi-purpose, concentrated cleaning supplies**, rather than job-specific, ready-to-use supplies.
- **Refill condiment bottles from bulk supplies.**
- **Place rubber mats around bus and dishwashing stations** to reduce china and glass breakage and help prevent injury.
- **Minimize excessive use of trash bags** by compacting the trash in your garbage cans and emptying the cans only when they are full.
- **Donate or sell empty plastic pails or buckets** to anyone who can use them.

- **Instruct your staff to keep recyclables contaminant free.** Pay particular attention to glass recycling. Ceramics, drinking glasses, light bulbs, etc. should not be mixed with glass bottles and jars and are generally not collected for recycling. Check with your hauler or local recycling program for information on how recyclables should be prepared.

### Food

- **Code-date all products stored in the freezer and rotate properly.**
- **Arrange your refrigerated and dry storage areas to facilitate easy product access and rotation.** This will help minimize waste due to spills, breakage and spoilage.
- **Donate extra food to a local food bank.**
- **Evaluate and adjust portions** if meals are consistently returned unfinished.
- **Offer customers half-orders at a reduced cost.** Light eaters will appreciate the option and it will reduce food waste.
- **Send cooking oils, fats and grease to a rendering firm.** Contact your DNR waste management specialist for service providers, or look up a provider on the DNR markets directory website under "other materials."
- **Look into composting food waste rather than throwing it away.** Local farmers may take all or a portion of your food waste for landspreading or to supplement their compost pile.



## Resources

For additional information on recycling in Wisconsin, contact the DNR Waste and Materials Management Program at [DNRWasteMaterials@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:DNRWasteMaterials@Wisconsin.gov) or 608-266-2111.

**Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin** — A nonprofit association of business, government, nonprofits and trade associations. See [www.arowonline.org](http://www.arowonline.org). Contact AROW at [admin@arowonline.org](mailto:admin@arowonline.org) or (608) 843-7360.

**Solid and Hazardous Waste Education Center** — Provides information and technical assistance to businesses on waste reduction, recycling and pollution prevention. See [www.uwex.edu/shwec/](http://www.uwex.edu/shwec/). Contact SHWEC at [shwec-help@uwm.edu](mailto:shwec-help@uwm.edu).

**WasteCap Resources, Inc.** — A nonprofit dedicated to providing waste reduction and recycling assistance for the benefit of business and the environment. See [www.wastecap.org](http://www.wastecap.org). Contact WasteCap at [wastecap@wastecap.org](mailto:wastecap@wastecap.org) or (414) 961-1100 or (608) 245-1100.

**Wisconsin Business Recycling Toolkit** — A toolkit for commercial, business, institutions and other away from home recycling. See [www.shwec.uwm.edu/recyclingtoolkit/](http://www.shwec.uwm.edu/recyclingtoolkit/).

**Wisconsin Recycling Markets Directory** — A detailed directory of recyclers, haulers and contractors throughout the state. Enter the item you would like to recycle to see a list of recyclers in your area. See [www.wisconsinrecyclingdirectory.com](http://www.wisconsinrecyclingdirectory.com).



**DNR recycling signage. Contact the DNR to use these images for your business.**



## Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Bureau of Waste and Materials Management/WA/5  
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For more information on away from home recycling, or to order publications, contact [DNRWasteMaterials@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:DNRWasteMaterials@Wisconsin.gov) or (608) 266-2111.

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