

Are You Throwing Money in the Trash?

Occupational risks, environmental hazards and operational inefficiencies in waste management are a triple threat to your bottom line

Waste management is prone to a number of potentially costly issues, from workplace injuries to environmental contamination, and it's

easy to see why. Overexertion and heavy lifting – two common ailments that can result from lugging heavy garbage containers and lifting bags into dumpsters – are also two of the main causes for workplace injury, according to 2015 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employers pay an average of \$60,618 for each workplace injury claim and lose an average of 39 working days each year. Add in potential fines for improper disposal and the financial toll that any inefficient process can take, and it becomes clear how problems in the waste management process can become costly very quickly.

“Every company, from an office or factory to a construction site or hospital, produces and must dispose of waste,” explains Derrick Masimer, Vice President of Sales Operations for Toter, a manufacturer of ergonomic waste carts, containers and lifting equipment. “However, improper disposal, hauling and lifting practices can cause overexertion, repetitive stress or back injuries, result in slip and fall incidents or expose workers to other workplace hazards. Taking a closer look at your facility’s waste stream and making a few simple changes can have a huge positive effect on workplace safety and injury prevention.”

Where Hazards Happen

Facilities with waste management processes that require manual lifting and dumping are the most vulnerable to workplace injury claims, Masimer says. Bending, reaching overhead, lifting heavy items or even just slipping on some trash that has escaped its receptacle can easily result in a workplace injury.

“Front load dumpers have loading heights of 4 to 5 feet, which can be a risk to staff who are trying to lift a 30-pound garbage bag over their head and into a dumpster. There’s a chance of back injuries,” adds Geoff Aardsma, Vice President of Client Services at Enevo, a technology-enabled waste and recycling services provider for facilities. “These are steel containers that aren’t always the safest, so if you interact with the steel, there’s the chance of a cut. The area around the dumpster always needs to be kept very clean because otherwise rodent infestations or slip and fall situations might arise. Some properties also have mechanical equipment like compactors, and those have several moving parts with safety concerns.”

Environmental risks abound as well, especially if you’re disposing of potentially dangerous material. A spill that’s not dealt with properly or an improper disposal that contaminates the whole load could result in fines – to say nothing of what could happen if you miss someone else throwing

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—Bob Valair, Director of Energy and Environmental Services, Staples

hazardous waste into your waste stream because you aren't paying attention.

"We have procedures in place to show that we document and track our waste stream. It would surprise you what ends up in a dumpster from illegal dumping," says Bob Valair, Director of Energy and Environmental Management for Staples. "We've had medical waste, dead animals, building construction materials and landscaping material. Having a waste services company come in as a partner helps us minimize illegal dumping problems without putting Staples and our associates at risk."

The direct and indirect costs associated with a contaminated container can get expensive, Valair notes. That's why it's so important to know what's in your waste and ensure it's being disposed of properly. Locking containers and proper signage will also cut down on illegal dumping.

Other Sources of Inefficiency

Fines and worker's compensation claims aren't the only ways your disposal process could be wasting money. In a way, the entire process is built on inefficiency, so it behooves you to do what you can to find savings opportunities.

"The activity of generating waste is a cost," Aardsma explains. "You spend money on waste at every point. First

you purchased material that you didn't end up using or that had packaging you couldn't reuse, so now you have to pay for somebody to segregate it and treat it as waste. Then you have to have somebody transport it to a waste container. You have pieces of your real estate dedicated to collecting that waste – if you have an office building and they have to put in a compactor to deal with the waste, that's space that could have been loading dock space or parking spots. Then, of course, the cost of collecting and properly disposing of these materials costs money. You have to look at the entire process of waste generation from supply chain to disposal."

Landfill volume fees are a great place to look for savings opportunities. The more you recycle, the less has to be hauled to the landfill. Staples separates e-waste (such as batteries and cell phones), mixed paper, cardboard, pallets, batteries, old equipment and other materials. Weekly inspections make sure everything is going to the right place according to Staples' policies and procedures. The retailer also maintains detailed documentation throughout the whole waste cycle, Valair explains.

Next, review how often your waste containers are picked up. If trucks are coming by too often, you're wasting money; if they don't come often enough, the overflow attracts pests and creates a

hazard around the container.

"We have a right-sizing program that's based on volume of sales and auditing to make sure we have the right container. We continue to audit to make sure there's no cardboard, mixed paper, plastic or metal going into the waste stream, which also helps with right-sizing," Valair says. "We know stores A and B need a 6-yard container picked up every 10 days. Store C needs an 8-yard container picked up every week. However, if you're cleaning out the building, you can call for an extra pickup."

Staples also utilizes smart compactors with gauges and sensors that let FMs know when the container is nearly full so they can call for service, with a goal of scheduling pickups when the container is full instead of half-empty. Automated collection of data about waste generation can save not only money, but a considerable amount of time, adds Masimer.

Raising Revenue and Forecasting Future Needs

As you work to increase your recycling percentage and decrease the volume of trash bound for the landfill, it's crucial to enlist employees and tenants to make sure the maximum amount of waste is diverted. Not only is this better for the environment and less wasteful of your FM budget, it can actually generate revenue in some cases.

"You can get money for things like plastic, pallets and shrink wrap," notes Valair. "Why pay to have it disposed of when you can reduce your waste cost and show generated revenue? We communicate to our associates that we care about the environment and that they can have an impact. Do your research and find the right waste and recycling partner to help you manage your costs and develop your business plan."

For One Bush Street in San Francisco, an 18-floor office tower with 22 tenants, this took the form of a building-wide effort that started with a free recycling consultation. A survey revealed that most of the tenants wanted composting and recycling collection, so the building management firm, Tishman Speyer Properties, instituted a green team with a representative from each office tenant. SF Environment, the city's environmental

agency, trained the team and supplied posters, fliers and stickers to raise awareness of the building's new policies.

Key to this effort was demonstrating to building custodians that their role wasn't to separate recycling from trash, but to manage a new organization system for collection. Day porters service the compostable collection containers in kitchens and conference rooms so that the night janitors don't have extra work, and management recognizes the custodians with quarterly gift certificates. The results speak for themselves: One Bush Street achieved a 76% waste diversion rate, keeping 260 tons of material out of the landfill each year. Disposal costs have dropped by over 50%, translating to an annual savings of \$24,000.

In addition to better diversion practices, an emphasis on continual training and improvement is crucial, adds Aardsma.

Anyone who interacts with the waste should be educated in safe disposal techniques, including keeping the disposal area clean, lifting without sustaining a back injury and packaging certain kinds of waste to prevent spillage.

"We follow a very pragmatic approach of investigating and benchmarking current waste generation behavior, which involves understanding what you're throwing away, how much is being thrown away and the best way to get it from its point of generation to the point of collection. It's about handling material in an efficient manner that protects the health and safety of folks who are interacting with the materials," Aardsma says. "Then at the point of collection, we want to provide every opportunity to handle the waste in the most environmentally friendly way possible, including recognizing hazardous waste and focusing on

recycling and waste reduction."

Don't stop improving your waste management practices after you've got cost, safety and efficiency under control, Valair urges. Waste generation rates and the contents of the waste stream can change over time. Monitoring your organization's output lets you keep an eye on these trends and adjust your practices or pickup frequency accordingly.

"Continue to revisit the processes because things are changing. The market is changing from a revenue perspective and costs are going up," Valair says. "Even if you set up your program years ago, continue to evaluate your processes. Take every opportunity to generate good business practices throughout your organization." **B**

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WASTE MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

Could your waste management procedures use some work? Check out these useful tools.

SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

SFENVIRONMENT.ORG

This city agency offers a wealth of information for businesses, including a Zero Waste Toolkit with free signage to demonstrate what belongs in recycling, composting and garbage containers. Case studies demonstrate how San Francisco businesses have saved thousands of dollars by reducing waste.

WASTEWISE AND ENERGY STAR PORTFOLIO MANAGER

EPA.GOV

Already tracking your energy consumption in the EPA's ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager? You can track your waste in it too. Once you've got a handle on waste tracking, join the WasteWise program to receive formal recognition for your waste reduction efforts.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (OSHA)

OSHA.GOV

OSHA isn't just a reporting agency – it also has a number of tools to help avoid workplace injuries in the first place. Check out their fact sheets and recommended procedures to develop your organization's protocols for safe lifting, hauling and more.

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