

Best Practices Guide

for Business Recycling



Guide to recycling in commercial settings

January 2016

Best practices guide for business recycling

Nearly two-thirds of the waste created at businesses and non-profits is recyclable. Having a strong recycling program demonstrates your organization's commitment to sustainability and the community, can help your bottom line, conserves natural resources and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

This guide will help your business implement a successful and sustainable recycling program. This guide is intentionally detailed to help you develop the most successful program possible, so don't be intimidated or overwhelmed by the information provided. And remember, Hennepin County can help get you up and running. We offer grants, free signage and professional advice from our staff to help you start or improve your recycling program.

All business can recycle the basics like paper, cardboard, cartons, plastic, metal and glass. Businesses that produce a lot of food waste and non-recyclable paper, such as napkins, plates, cups and paper towels, should consider adding organics recycling to their waste diversion efforts.

In an organics-recycling program, organic material, such as food waste and non-recyclable paper products, is collected and hauled separately from trash and conventional recycling. Organic waste is sent to a composting facility where the waste is managed to produce compost, a nutrient-rich soil amendment that is used in landscaping and road construction projects. There are also food-to-people and food-to-animals programs. In food-to-people programs, edible food is donated to food rescue agencies that help people in need. In food-to-animals programs, food that is no longer safe for people to eat is sent to farmers or recyclers that process food into animal feed.

For purposes of this guide, recycling refers to the conventional recycling of materials such as paper, cardboard, cartons, plastic, metal and glass whereas organics recycling will be referred to as organics recycling or composting.

Table of Contents

Implementing a recycling program.....	3
Assess your situation.....	3
Items accepted for recycling.....	3
Items accepted for organics recycling.....	3
Recycling generated at businesses.....	4
Develop your action plan.....	5
Hennepin County resources.....	5
Set up your program.....	6
Kick off your program.....	7
Promote your program.....	7
Reduce waste.....	8
Become an Environmental Partner.....	8
Frequently asked questions.....	9-11
More information.....	11

Implementing a recycling program

Assess your current situation

Visit all areas of your building where waste is generated. Look at the contents of your trash and any existing recycling containers to determine how much material is getting thrown away and how well people are recycling. Use the waste assessment checklist (download the checklist at www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling) to assess your current situation and identify opportunities for improvement.



Be sure to take a look at your central trash and recycling collection area during the walk-through of your business. This is usually outside in the parking lot or near the loading dock.



Take a look in your trash to get an idea of what you're throwing away that could be recycled instead.

Items accepted for recycling

The following items are accepted for recycling:

- **Paper, uncoated, all kinds and colors:** mail and envelopes, magazines and catalogs, packing paper, file folders, paper tablet backings, newspapers and inserts, phone books, soft-cover books, supplies and electronics boxes, cracker/cookie boxes
- **Cardboard, unwaxed**
- **Cartons:** milk and cream cartons, soy and rice milk cartons, soup cartons, juice boxes
- **Plastic:** bottles and jugs, cups and containers (yogurt, pudding and fruit cups, iced coffee/tea cups, cottage cheese containers, baked goods, deli and take-out containers), clear, rigid packaging from electronics, supplies, etc.
- **Glass:** food and beverage bottles and jars
- **Metal:** food and beverage cans



Items accepted for organics recycling

Items accepted for organics recycling:

- **All food or parts of a food:** Fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, seafood, bones, dairy products, eggs, pasta, rice, beans, bakery goods, nuts, shells
- **Food-soiled paper:** napkins, paper towels, parchment paper, paper egg cartons, waxed cardboard, pizza boxes
- **Compostable foodware:** Certified compostable paper and plastic cups, plates, bowls, utensils and containers. Look for these logos or the term "compostable" on certified products



- **Other compostable items:** coffee grounds and filters, paper tea bags, plant and flower trimmings, wooden items such as chop sticks and stir sticks

Recycling generated at businesses



Different recyclables are generated in various areas throughout a business. Consider the waste generated in offices, the copy room, kitchen and employee break rooms or cafeteria.

The following recyclable materials and organic wastes are commonly generated in different areas of a business.

Area	Recycling typically generated	Organic waste typically generated
Employee desks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office paper, mail, boxes, cardboard Plastic food containers and cups Metal cans Plastic bottles and jugs Glass bottles and jars Food and beverage cartons (e.g., milk, juice, soup) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food waste Food-soiled paper products
Printing/copy rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office paper, mail, cardboard, boxes (from pens and other office supplies) Shredded paper 	
Employee break rooms, dining room, cafeteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metal cans Plastic bottles and jugs Glass bottles and jars Newspaper, magazines, boxes (e.g., cereal and cracker boxes) Plastic food containers and plastic cups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food waste Food-soiled paper products, certified compostable utensils and certified compostable cups
Restrooms		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper towels
Kitchen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metal cans Plastic bottles and jugs Glass bottles and jars Food and beverage cartons (e.g., milk, juice, soup) Plastic wrap and bags (must be collected and recycled separately from single-sort recycling)* Cardboard, boxes (pasta and cracker boxes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food waste Certified compostable paper containers, cups and plates Paper towels
Storage/supply rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper, cardboard, boxes Plastic bottles Plastic wrap and bags (must be collected and recycled separately from single-sort recycling)* 	
Front desk/waiting room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metal cans Plastic bottles and jugs Glass bottles and jars Plastic food containers and cups Newspaper, magazines, mixed paper 	
Manufacturing/assembly room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cardboard, boxes 	
Shipping and receiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cardboard, boxes Plastic wrap and bags (must be collected and recycled separately from single-sort recycling)* 	

* Businesses can sign up for the It's In The Bag plastic film and bags recycling program. For more information, visit recycleminnesota.org/work/its-in-the-bag/

Develop your action plan

Once you've assessed your current waste situation and identified opportunities for improvement, you're ready to start planning exactly what you need to do to start or improve your recycling or organics recycling program. Developing your action plan involves figuring out how many and what types of recycling containers your building needs, making any necessary changes to your hauling service, getting management on board, and consulting with your cleaning service.

Determine what containers you need

Think about the places in your building where waste is discarded. You want to make sure that there are enough recycling bins to match the number of trash bins, and that high-traffic areas, such as break rooms, mail rooms, lobbies and kitchens, contain enough recycling bins and not just trash bins. Make sure your containers are appropriate for the materials you're planning to put into them. For example, consider smaller containers for heavier materials. You will also want to make sure that your containers are clearly labeled and color-coded to help people sort their waste correctly. To see examples of common recycling containers that are available, download the business recycling grant Option 1 or Option 2 budget documents at www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling

Assess your hauling service

Find out how much you're paying for waste service by looking at your waste bill. If a third party handles the billing for your waste, ask them for the trash and recycling information. Check the terms and duration of your waste contract. Then:

1. Get quotes

- Call your waste hauler for quotes on adding recycling and/or organics-recycling service.
- Request quotes from at least two other haulers to compare prices. Contact your city's recycling coordinator to get a list of current licensed commercial haulers in your city (find contact information on page 9). Visit www.hennepin.us/organics for a list of haulers that offer organics-recycling service in the county.

2. Determine what outdoor containers you need

- Ask what types and sizes of outdoor containers the hauler offers (e.g., carts or dumpsters) and their frequency of pick-up to determine if their containers and service frequency meet your business' needs.
- Keeping in mind what you found when you looked in your trash containers, do you think you can divert a lot of your trash toward recycling and/or organics recycling? If so, ask your waste hauler about downsizing your trash dumpster or reducing the frequency of pick ups to save money.
- To avoid unnecessary costs, start with a small recycling and/or organics recycling dumpster. You can always increase the size of your recycling dumpsters as your collection expands and improves.



- 3. **Consider using a resource management contract.** A resource management contract places the economic value of the contract on service rather than on volume, and can help you cut costs. Get templates for Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and contracts at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Resource Management Programs page (www.pca.state.mn.us/tchy7c1).

Hennepin County resources: grants for bins, free container labels and staff assistance available

Hennepin County provides grants of up to \$50,000 to help businesses, non-profit organizations and institutions start or improve programs to reduce waste and divert recyclables and organics (food and non-recyclable paper) from the trash. Funding can help with the purchase of recycling containers, equipment and hauling services and minor improvements to loading docks and waste enclosures. You will need to know the quantity and types of containers needed when applying for a Hennepin County business recycling grant (for the types available, see the Option 1 budget and Option 2 budget documents at www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling). You'll also want to order free container labels from Hennepin County for your existing bins and for your new bins (see the example photos on page 7).

During development of your action plan is a good time to seek free, professional assistance from Hennepin County. County staff members can walk through your building with you to determine the number and sizes of containers you need, and make sure they fit in the spaces (e.g., in cabinets, under countertops, in tight spaces, etc.). Staff can also offer feedback on ideas, answer your questions and get your recycling containers set up with labels and placed in the best location.

Visit www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling to:

- Get the business recycling grant application and see the types and sizes of containers that can be ordered.
- Order free container labels and signs.
- Find out how to request free staff assistance.



Hennepin County staff help you plan for and set up your recycling program.

Get management support

Report your findings to your manager or building owner to make sure they're on board. Point out that recycling demonstrates your business' commitment to environmental stewardship and the community. Also, you may be able to reduce trash hauling service. Finally, let them know that there are numerous free resources to get you started, such as grants for containers and supplies, signage and educational materials, and county staff assistance.

Consult with cleaning company

Cleaning staff are key players in the success of your recycling program because they're responsible for getting the recycling and waste out of the building and into the proper containers for pick-up.

Set up your program

Now that you've ordered new containers, have your hauling service in place and have management on board, it's time to set up your recycling system.

Set up your recycling containers

Remember the following when setting up your recycling containers:

• Make recycling convenient

- Create sorting areas by placing recycling, trash and organics containers next to one another. Set up sorting stations where waste is generated and where there is heavy traffic.
- If employees do not have recycling bins at their desks, consider setting up an intermediate recycling area for approximately every 20 employees. Make sure the recycling area is conveniently located in a high-traffic area, such as by the break room or restroom.
- Put a recycling bin by the mailboxes and copy machine so it's convenient for people when sorting their mail and making copies.
- When starting an organics recycling program, it may help to start in the kitchen or lunchroom and expand to other areas over time.

• Make recycling easy

- Use consistent, color-coded containers and signs with images of items to help users figure out what goes where. The idea is to distinguish between the waste streams as much as possible so users are aware that not all waste is trash and to help them easily sort their waste. We recommend blue for recycling, green for organics, and red, black or gray for trash.
- In addition to color-coding, using different shapes of containers and lids, and signs, labels or posters can draw attention to the different containers.
- Place labels and signs on or near containers so users can refer to them to determine how to sort their waste. Options for placing signs and labels include on the sides and lids of containers, on the wall, hung from the ceiling, or on an easel. Placing signs at eye-level is an effective way to ensure they'll be seen. Consider using multiple signs and labels to reinforce the materials that go in each container. For example, place labels on the front and sides of the containers, labels on the lid and posters on the wall.



Having organized and visible recycling stations leads to successful recycling. These stations help customers and employees figure out what materials go in what bin.



Placing a recycling bin at each employee's desk makes recycling convenient.

Set up your central collection area

Make sure you consider the setup of your central trash and recycling collection area. Keep the following in mind when setting up your central collection area:

- Place all of your dumpsters/carts together. Placing the trash dumpster closer to the building than the recycling and organics recycling dumpsters may result in recyclables and food waste being disposed of in the trash dumpster.
- Clearly label all of your dumpsters/carts to help workers identify quickly and accurately which waste goes where.
- Include the dumpster area in the training of your cleaning and other staff.

Kick off your program

Gaining support and buy-in from everyone in your business is crucial to the success of your recycling program. Train your **entire staff** to make sure that everyone knows what can and cannot be recycled and to ensure that recyclables and organics are sorted, collected and stored properly.

To get your program off to a successful start:

- Plan training or a kick-off event for employees to share the company's recycling goals and show them all the materials that can be recycled.
- Plan a short monitoring period in which someone stands by the waste station(s) to help employees and/or customers separate their waste correctly into recycling, organics and trash bins. This is particularly important with organics recycling, which is a new concept for many people. Having someone available to help with sorting and to answer questions reduces contamination and makes for a smoother transition as people learn new habits. Make sure to provide gloves and grabbers for monitors. If your site has sufficient support, maintaining monitors beyond the initial stage will help ensure the success of your program.
- Train cleaning staff and make sure everyone knows which containers and bags to use for each type of collected material. If dumpsters are not clearly labeled, Hennepin County has large color-coded labels available.



Promote your program

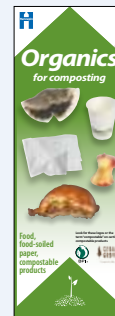
Promoting your program to employees and customers is critical to ongoing success. Businesses have used a variety of techniques to promote their recycling and/or organics-recycling programs that make it fun and educational for employees and customers. Some of the methods include:

- Creating a competition between floors, departments, etc. to see who can improve recycling the most.
- Forming a green team or appointing recycling champions to help educate employees and customers, keep everyone informed of the business' progress toward reducing waste and recycling more, and spearheading additional environmental efforts.
- Working closely with their waste hauler to monitor progress.
- Conducting waste assessments. Get a how-to guide at www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling.

Make sure to let customers know about your program! Businesses are evaluated on many aspects of their performance, including their environmental stewardship. Waste reduction and recycling programs show customers and vendors that your business cares about the community and environment. So, share your recycling efforts, goals and results with your customers.

Get free container labels

You don't have to create your own signs – Hennepin County has a variety of signs and labels available for free to all businesses and organizations in the county. Order them at www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling.



Get free help with staff training

Hennepin County staff members are available to conduct staff training.



Reduce waste

Reducing waste is even better than recycling. Take a look at your waste assessment checklist (download the checklist at www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling). Are there items in your trash or recycling that you could reduce, eliminate or replace with greener alternatives? Reducing waste is a smart approach to saving money and natural resources, and there are steps you can take in every area of your business. Consider some of the following:

- Set printer defaults to print double-sided, and encourage employees to print less.
- Replace plastic cups, plates and utensils with reusable counterparts. Provide reusable dishes in break rooms and kitchens, and encourage employees to bring lunches in reusable containers.
- Adopt green purchasing policies, such as selecting products that are less toxic, conserve energy or water, or use recycled-content materials.
- Reduce packaging waste by buying supplies in bulk and using reusable shipping containers.
- Donate unwanted supplies and other items to organizations such as Companies to Classrooms (www.companiestoclassrooms.org) or exchange with other businesses on the Minnesota Materials Exchange (www.mnexchange.org).
- Host green meetings.
- Choose non-hazardous or less-hazardous cleaning products and use reusable towels and rags.
- Evaluate your company's processes to identify ways to use raw materials more efficiently and use less-hazardous alternatives.

Find more information and tips for reducing waste at www.rethinkrecycling.com/businesses/how-guides.



Make reusable dishes and utensils available in your break room to reduce waste.

Become a Hennepin County Environmental Partner

The Hennepin County Environmental Partners program recognizes businesses for their efforts to recycle and divert organic waste, which includes food scraps and non-recyclable paper, from the trash.

Businesses can be recognized for diverting wastes in the following categories:



We recycle: Materials including paper, cardboard, cartons, glass, plastic and metal are sent to a recycling facility so they can be manufactured into new products.



We compost: Organic waste, which includes food waste, non-recyclable paper and compostable foodware, is sent to a composting facility where it is recycled into valuable compost that is used in landscaping and road construction projects.



We feed animals: Food that is no longer safe for people to eat, including food prep waste, plate waste, spoiled or outdated food and unpackaged frozen food, is processed into animal feed.



We donate food: Leftover edible food, including unserved menu items, food from catered events and day-old baked goods, is donated to food rescue agencies to help people in need.

Participating businesses get window decals, a listing in our online directory, and additional educational materials to communicate their efforts to their customers. Apply to become a partner and find businesses that have been recognized at www.hennepin.us/environmentalpartners.



Kim Bartmann proudly displays Environmental Partner decals at her Barquette Restaurant.

Frequently asked questions

Haulers and drop-off options

Which haulers collect recycling?

Many of the same waste haulers that provide trash service offer recycling pick up as well. Your city recycling coordinator can provide you with a list of current licensed commercial haulers in your city.

Which haulers collect organics?

A list of haulers that collect organics for composting in Hennepin County is available at www.hennepin.us/organics.

Are there drop-off options for recycling collected at a business?

Hennepin County accepts recycling, including organics, from businesses free of charge at our drop-off facilities.

For recyclables, you may self-haul one pick-up truck load of recyclables per week to the following locations:

Brooklyn Park Transfer Station and Recycling Center

8100 Jefferson Highway, Brooklyn Park, 55445

South Hennepin Recycling and Problem Waste Drop-Off Center

1400 West 96th Street, Bloomington, 55431

For organics, you may drop off organics Tuesday through Friday at Brooklyn Park ONLY. Organics are not accepted on Saturday. Organics must be in BPI-certified compostable bags, and there is a limit of five bags per person per day.

Visit www.hennepin.us/dropoffs or call 612-348-3777 for information including hours, materials accepted and guidelines.

Find additional drop-off options at www.rethinkrecycling.com/businesses/recycling-drop-centers.

Program costs and savings

How does recycling reduce disposal costs if it requires additional hauling service and collection containers?

From an economic perspective, recycling and organics recycling are cost-effective waste management strategies in that they reduce the higher costs associated with disposing of waste as trash. In Hennepin County, trash disposal costs \$55 per ton with added costs of a 17 percent state solid waste tax and 14.5 percent Hennepin County solid waste fee. On the other hand, recycling and organics recycling are exempt from the state tax and county fee. Processing organic waste costs \$15 per ton and haulers can typically make revenue on recycling.

So, the goal of recycling programs is to reduce trash service and related costs. Without effective recycling programs, businesses manage the majority of their waste as trash. Managing waste as trash results in large dumpsters that are serviced almost daily, which both result in higher disposal costs.

What are the upfront costs for starting a recycling and/or organics-recycling program?

You will need the following materials to get started:

- Containers
- Compostable bags (for organics-recycling programs)
- Educational signage and promotional materials

Remember, the major cost savings of a recycling or organics-recycling program is in reduced trash disposal costs; therefore, it is important that as much waste is diverted from the trash as possible.

City recycling coordinators

Bloomington	952-563-8394
Brooklyn Center	763-493-8007
Brooklyn Park	763-493-8006
Champlin.....	763-421-8100
Chanhassen	952-361-1800
Corcoran	763-420-2288
Crystal.....	763-493-8006
Dayton	763-427-3224
Deephaven.....	952-890-1100
Eden Prairie.....	952-949-8330
Edina	952-826-0463
Excelsior.....	952-474-5233
Golden Valley.....	763-593-8030
Greenfield	763-477-6464
Greenwood	952-358-9935
Hanover	763-972-3335
Hopkins	952-939-1382
Independence.....	763-479-0527
Long Lake	952-473-6961
Loretto	763-479-4305
Maple Grove.....	763-494-6365
Maple Plain.....	763-479-3335
Medina.....	763-473-4643
Medicine Lake	763-542-9701
Minneapolis	612-673-2917
Minnetonka	952-988-8430
Minnetonka Beach	952-941-5174
Minnetrista	952-446-1660
Mound	952-472-0603
New Hope.....	763-493-8006
Orono	952-249-4600
Osseo	763-425-2624
Plymouth.....	763-509-5906
Richfield.....	612-861-9365
Robbinsdale.....	763-537-4534
Rockford.....	763-477-6565
Rogers.....	763-428-2253
St. Anthony.....	763-784-8349
St. Bonifacius	952-446-1061
St. Louis Park.....	952-924-2555
Shorewood.....	952-960-7900
Spring Park	952-471-9051
Tonka Bay	952-474-7994
Wayzata	763-404-5366
Woodland.....	952-474-4755

Organics recycling

What happens to organic waste that is not collected for composting?

Without an organics-recycling program, organic waste is collected and disposed of as trash. Organics contain valuable nutrients that are wasted when they are not composted. Depending on your location and waste hauler, trash in the county is either sent to a landfill or burned to generate energy. Composting organic waste is preferable to landfilling (where decomposing organics generate methane, a potent greenhouse gas) and incineration.



Finished compost is a nutrient-rich soil additive that is used in landscaping and road construction projects.

Are there other options for keeping food waste out of the trash?

Yes. In addition to composting, there are food-to-people and food-to-animals programs. In food-to-people programs, edible food is donated to food rescue agencies that help people in need. In food-to-animals programs, food that is no longer safe for people to eat is sent to farmers or recyclers that process food into animal feed.

These programs have different parameters than composting, such as health requirements, and are limited to food items only. For these reasons, organics recycling for composting diverts the most waste because you can include non-recyclable paper products. Learn more about the various options at www.hennepin.us/organics.



Kitchen prep waste can be diverted for animal feed or composting.

What about recyclable paper?

Although recyclable paper is technically compostable, it should be recycled. Paper, especially high-grade paper such as white paper, should be collected for paper recycling to reduce our reliance on trees to make paper and to support the recycling market. Paper products that are included in organics-recycling programs are those that have no place in the recycled-paper market because they are low-quality or contaminated by food.

How will organics recycling affect my conventional recycling program?

Organics recycling has been shown to reinvigorate conventional recycling and awareness of waste reduction in general, resulting in further environmental and economic benefits. Many businesses take pride in showing their environmental stewardship through organics recycling.

What is the difference between compostable and degradable or biodegradable products?

Although both degradable and compostable products can be bio-based, meaning they are made from plant derivatives such as starch and fibers, only products labeled compostable are certified to be fully compostable.

Many products labeled biodegradable, degradable and oxo-degradable are made of either plastic or bio-plastic with an additive that causes the plastic to break down into small pieces. These degradable products are not compostable and should be avoided in organics-recycling programs.

On the other hand, products labeled compostable are fully compostable. The Biodegradable Products Institute (www.bpiworld.org) has more information on products that are certified as compostable.

Where can I buy compostable bags and foodservice ware?

To get started, businesses can obtain a six-month supply of compostable bags as part of a Hennepin County business recycling grant. Compostable bags are sold in retail stores. A list of local vendors of compostable bags and foodservice ware is available at www.hennepin.us/organics under “compostable bags and foodservice ware.”

Are all compostable products certified?



The Biodegradable Products Institute and Cedar Grove Composting Inc. certify a range of compostable products. Visit www.bpiworld.org and www.cedar-grove.com/compostable/accepted-items/ for a list

of certified compostable products, and look for the certification logo on products you are purchasing.

Be aware that BPI and Cedar Grove certification is an option manufacturers can use to verify a product's compostability to customers, but not all compostable products are certified.

Do compostable bags cost more?

Yes. Compostable bags cost more than plastic bags.

Why can't plastic bags be used?

Conventional plastic bags, including those that are degradable and bio-based, do not compost. Plastic bags at composting facilities are problematic because the plastic must be separated from the organic waste, which is expensive, and some plastic may still end up in the compost, which decreases the quality of the compost. Using compostable bags reduces processing costs and enhances the quality of the finished compost.

What about not using bags altogether?

Not using bags to collect organics recycling is a possibility, but issues concerning odor, aesthetics and waste freezing to dumpsters and carts during winter need to be addressed. You must also ensure that both custodians and waste haulers are on board. Although not using bags reduces costs, businesses that have experimented with collecting organic waste without bags have found it inconvenient and have ended up using compostable bags.

Where can I get more information?

Visit www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling for:

- Recycling grant guidelines and applications
- Free labels and signs
- Educational materials
- Environmental Partners business recognition program
- Resources and tips for improving recycling and reducing waste

For assistance, contact program coordinator Andre Xiong at andre.x.xiong@hennepin.us or 612-543-1316.

Visit www.rethinkrecycling.com/business for:

- Business recycling guide where you can search for facilities by location, materials accepted and services provided.
- Five steps to better business recycling
- How-to guides for reducing waste, increase recycling, holding green meetings and more.

Hennepin County
Public Works
Environment and Energy
www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling
612-543-1316

