

Sustainable Materials Management for Hotels



Encompassing Reduce, Reuse and Recycle

Many people are familiar with the phrase “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle”, but many only focus on the last word. While it's true that recycling is more environmentally responsible than simply sending materials to landfills, when you reduce waste at the source, the need to recycle and dispose is reduced altogether.¹ | [Learn More >](#)

Efficient and sustainable materials management requires continuous and active participation in the process. Waste reduction is a crucial component of becoming more sustainable. Reusing or repurposing products to extend their life cycle will also help to generate less waste. The main focus of a recycling program should be to bring awareness to the ways in which one can reduce waste and reuse materials sustainably prior to making the decision to recycle.² | [Learn More >](#)

Reduction at the Source

In pollution prevention, the most powerful impacts are made when waste is reduced directly at the source. As consumers, it is important to address the issue of over-consumption. *What products*

are necessary to purchase? Do the products need to be brand new? What quantity of the product should be purchased? Is the product and/or packaging recyclable?

Reducing the amount of material goods and products that are purchased upfront will reduce the amount of waste that is produced at the end. When working with vendors and suppliers, choose products that present the lowest environmental impact. Choosing a local vendor as opposed to a cross-country vendor can reduce transportation costs and associated greenhouse gas emissions.

Maintaining an accurate and complete inventory control system can also reduce surplus waste from expired goods.³ When remodeling or expanding, reuse building materials either in the construction itself or even in the landscape. Additionally, look for items that come in recyclable packaging, are made from recyclable materials, and/or can be recycled themselves.⁴ | [Learn More >](#)

Once the overall level of consumption is reduced, one can then look to other sustainable life cycle options, such as reusing landscaping materials, repurposing furniture, retrofitting tools and, last but not least, recycling.

Six Steps to Implementing an Effective Zero Waste Program⁵

Step 1: Select a recycling coordinator. This person needs to have good communication and organizational skills. Getting the recycling program off the ground will take time and effort, however, monitoring it is much less demanding.

Step 2: Using page 27 as a guide, [conduct a waste audit](#).⁶ The goal of the waste audit is to find out what is in the hotel's trash. This audit will help to identify which materials can be collected for donation, re-use, or recycling and which waste products can simply be avoided altogether.

Step 3: Determine which materials to collect for reuse and/or recycling.⁷ After identifying areas where waste can be reduced at the source, the next step is to determine which materials to donate, which to recycle and where to donate or to recycle them. Decide whether curbside pick-up or facility drop-off is most convenient.

Step 4: Select your collection contractor. Based on the amount of recyclables that are generated at the hotel, decide which collection company or contractor will provide the most reliable service at the best price. Haulers usually offer recycling services in conjunction with existing solid waste contracts. If the

hauler that is currently contracted does not offer such services, directly contracting with a recycling service provider may prove to be most beneficial.⁸

Step 5: Design your collection system.

The key is to [make recycling as simple and easy](#) as it is to throw things away. Use colored bins, posters, signs, pictures, or any combination of these to convey what types of recyclables go in each container. Make sure that these bins are distinctively different from trash bins so that they are easily identifiable and put them in high-traffic areas.⁹

Step 6: Promote employee / tenant participation.

Employees will participate if they know about the program and understand its benefits. Announce the program, schedule meetings / educational sessions, and follow-up regularly to ensure participation. Consider an employee recognition program.

[Tenants will participate if they know what can be recycled](#) in your area and where to put those recyclables. Install recycling bins adjacent to trash bins and be sure to post clearly labeled signage, preferably with images, near the recycling bins.¹⁰ Front desk staff should mention that the hotel offers recycling services, show the guests where convenient drop-off stations are located, and (if applicable) explain which bin in the guest room is for recycling.

Guest Rooms

Consider incorporating either an extra bin used just for recycling in guest rooms or consolidating into a single-stream waste management system. Making recycling available and easy-to-do will encourage guests to take part in the collective effort. Waste reduction comes first, but recycling something is better than not recycling anything at all!

Hotel-Wide

Eliminating single-use products and disposable containers will reduce the total amount of waste that is generated. Implement a policy that prohibits or limits the use of such products; instead opt for more environmentally friendly alternatives such as reusable or refillable containers, in-house plates, bowls and cutlery, and cloth towels.



Collection Systems — Signage

It is crucially important to place easy-to-understand signage on recycling bins in order to increase participation in the collective recycling efforts of the hotel. Recycling bins should be uniform in style and similar in color scheme. One common practice is to include photos above the containers that displays what materials and items can be recycled.

As a hotel, it is not out of the ordinary to have guests from around the world that speak a multitude of languages. Photos are a great way to communicate what can be recycled without favoring one language over another. Consider creating unique signage that embodies the essence of the hotel. [This sign maker tool](#)¹¹ can be a great way to brainstorm some ideas and even create unique signage for recycling bins.

Success Stories

Hotel Congress, Tucson, AZ¹² — The historic Hotel Congress has become a Gold Level Green Leader on TripAdvisor after implementing a variety of sustainable materials management strategies and green tactics. In addition to keeping a beautiful on-site garden for fresh, locally-sourced kitchen ingredients, Hotel Congress works with a number of local businesses to foster innovative and collaborative partnerships, making it stand out in the tourism industry. Through the One Less Straw campaign, they have eliminated a significant number of straws used through the drink menu. They also switched to compostable paper coasters and 100% recycled drink cups, further reducing dependency on plastic. Hotel Congress soaks up the sun and the savings with a solar-powered water heater and an energy-efficient cooling system. | [Learn More >](#)

Hampton Inn & Suites, Greenville, SC¹³ — This hotel saved nearly \$2,000 in 2013 after implementing waste reduction and recycling strategies. Since then, the hotel has further reduced water consumption and energy usage through a linen reuse program and by installing smart thermostats in guest rooms and public areas. This hotel leveraged successful recycling initiatives to create new ways to reduce waste at the source! | [Learn More >](#)

Residence Inn by Marriot, Riverplace, Portland, OR¹⁴ — This Residence Inn began with a simple recycling system designed to collect only newspaper and cardboard. The program has evolved since 2007 and now encompasses a wide variety of paper, metals and plastics in a single stream container. The hotel also recognizes a “Recycler of the Week” with a gift card reward for those who go above and beyond in their recycling efforts. | [Learn More >](#)

Saint Paul Hotel, Saint Paul, MN¹⁵ — This hotel began its green journey by launching an organics recycling program, seeing a savings of roughly \$5,000 in the first six months of program implementation. The hotel was able to further increase diversion rates through improved training and single stream recycling services. Now, Saint Paul Hotel sees an estimated 156,675 pounds of recyclable material being diverted from the waste streams every year, achieving a 90% recycling rate. The program is estimated to have reduced an amount of carbon emissions that is roughly equivalent to taking 410 vehicles off the road. | [Learn More >](#)

Other Sustainable Materials Management Opportunities

Hotels represent a very unique business in which the diversity of functions and staff positions is nearly limitless. The wide range of responsibilities, 24-hour operating schedule and pressure to provide great service can reveal opportunities for reduction, reuse and recycling just about everywhere! Hotels can become leaders in environmental conservation and inspire others to participate while building meaningful relationships with communities. Hosting a zero-waste artisan craft fair or local farmer's market can be a great way to bring in local businesses and foster new partnership opportunities while also reducing the environmental impact of the event.¹⁷ Incorporating recycling bins throughout the event site will ensure that vendors and attendees know how and where to divert specific types of waste. Encourage your hotel's Green Team to spearhead the event and/or set up their own table at the event to share the hotel's green initiatives. Events like this will boost community engagement while showing the hotel's commitment to environmental stewardship.¹⁸

References

- ¹ [EPA. Recycling Basics.](#)
- ² [Recycling @ Work. recyclingatwork.org.](#)
- ³ [California Dept. of General Services. What is a Green Hotel?](#)
- ⁴ [Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Recycling for the Hospitality Industry.](#)
- ⁵ [Hawaii Department of Environmental Services. How to Set Up a Recycling Program.](#)
- ⁶ [Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose. How to Conduct a Waste Audit.](#)
- ⁷ [Arizona Recycling Coalition. Resources.](#)
- ⁸ [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Recycling and Waste Reduction for the Lodging Industry.](#)
- ⁹ [Keep America Beautiful. Improve Recycling Resources.](#)
- ¹⁰ [Stellin, Susan. New York Times. Getting the Guests to Sort.](#)
- ¹¹ [StopWaste. Sign Maker Tool.](#)
- ¹² [U.S. Green Building Council. Case Studies & Cocktails with Tucson Emerging 2030 District.](#)
- ¹³ [South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. It Works: Smart Business Recycling Success Stories.](#)
- ¹⁴ [Recycle @ Work. Success.](#)
- ¹⁵ [Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Success Story - 2014 Sustainable St. Paul Award Winner](#)
- ¹⁶ [EPA. Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2014 Fact Sheet.](#)
- ¹⁷ [EPA. Sustainable Materials Management.](#)
- ¹⁸ [Wastecare Corporation. Waste Reduction and Recycling Tips for Hotels.](#)

Additional Resources

[ADEQ. Recycling Locator.](#)
[Arizona Food Marketing Alliance. Bag Central Station.](#)
[National Recycling Coalition.](#)
[DGS California Green Lodging Program.](#)
[American Hotel and Lodging Association. Green Products and Programs.](#)
[American Hotel and Lodging Association. Green Guidelines.](#)

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