

## Facilitator — December 2015/January 2016



### Waste Not, Want Not

*Jeff Dover*

Restaurants stand to benefit from the changing nature of waste management

In the past, waste management was fairly simple. Whatever was left over or not used was thrown in the dumpster. The local hauler picked it up on a regular basis and took it away. Restaurants did not give much thought to minimizing the volume, recycling or composting, as there wasn't an economic payback.

Well, waste management has surely changed. Today, it has become a powerful driver in the sustainability industry and will only continue to gain importance and acceptance. Most of the larger chain restaurants have contracted with national waste management companies. Considering the ever-changing codes and laws for trash, recycling and composting, most restaurants are required to have an agreement with this type of vendor to ensure compliancy with local, state and federal agencies. Even smaller restaurant companies need to be engaged with trash haulers to determine what exactly is required in their waste activities. For the owners of a store or two, it is advisable to talk to the local haulers directly to understand the codes and negotiate the best pricing.

#### Waste Audits

Start by gathering bench-marking data to identify what needs to be implemented in your current recycling and waste reduction program. To get an accurate reading of exactly what is in the dumpster, complete a "waste audit." Due to the complexity of this task, I recommend using a local hauler or a vendor that has experience in this.

The basic steps of a waste audit are as follows:

- Use tarps, buckets and scales to measure the garbage.
- Ensure your dumpster is not shared with other customers. If so, set aside one day's worth of trash so it's not mixed with others.
- Use one full day's worth of material in the dumpster. If the amount of trash is too great, set aside a half day's worth. Time the audit for a "normal" business day. You probably do not want to complete the audit using a weekend or Monday trash day, as these are not typical days.
- Sort all garbage into several categories (e.g., recyclable versus non-recyclable plastics, paper, metal, glass and organics). Your local hauler or national vendor should be able to provide the exact number of categories needed for collection, which will depend on local and/or state codes.
- Lay out the tarp with all the trash and collect each item in a bucket, then record the weight and volumes of each.
- Due to the processes in the different types of restaurants, sorting may need to be broken down by area (e.g., prep, restroom, dining room, kitchen, etc.).
- Once the sorting is complete, calculate the totals. This will help you prioritize and indicate which area(s) need actionable items. Most audits will provide great insight and opportunities for implementing a new or more robust recycling and/or composting program. Discuss with your waste vendor the best economical solutions for waste sorting, reduction and future steps.

#### Waste Reduction

Reducing your waste is the No. 1 way to save on disposal fees, and it's the right thing to do. Almost 75 percent of materials in landfills consist of recyclables and compostable materials, while food packaging makes up approximately 70 percent of the total volume. A restaurant that currently does not recycle or compost can reduce

their trash disposal costs by as much as 50 percent.

To reduce waste, consider implementing the following steps:

- Work with food product suppliers to ensure they use only recyclable packaging materials and their use is minimized.
- Only use paper products from recycled materials.
- Use reusable options as much as possible (e.g., coffee filters and cups, drink coasters, etc.).
- Use compostable straws, stir sticks and other products wherever possible.
- Use multipurpose cleaners rather than job-specific ones.
- Have employees use washable or permanent ware mugs rather than throwaway paper.
- Minimize excess use of trash bags by manually compacting and only emptying when full.
- Set up rendering service for used fry oil. With today's prices, most companies will pay you for the oil.
- Set up service to take grease trap "sludge."
- Set up cardboard/glass/plastic recycling programs with a local collector.
- Set up a food donation program with local food banks.
- Compost your food waste.
- Use biodegradable take-out containers.
- Ensure whatever is delivered to the restaurants is reusable, recyclable or compostable.
- For equipment and materials that are not curbside recyclable, go to [www.Earth911.com](http://www.Earth911.com) to find a collection site nearby and inquire if they will accept the discarded item.
- Donate old kitchen equipment, utensils, tableware and other items to a local church or soup kitchen.

A robust, well-planned and efficient waste management program for restaurants will save companies thousands of dollars per year. Just as importantly, it will save the environment for the next generation of customers. These steps don't only save money; they make sense. RFMA has several waste management companies that can and will steer you down the proper path. Go green!

I'm always looking for feedback. Feel free to contact me at [jeff@rfmaonline.com](mailto:jeff@rfmaonline.com) or call at (972) 805-0905, ext. 3.

Dover and out.

Jeff Dover's facilities career started in 1985. He has been employed by several major chains (Ponderosa, Steak & Ale, Bennigan's, TGI Friday's, Fuddruckers and recently Five Guys Burgers and Fries). His technical education enabled him to take the lead as Energy Manager, Facilities Manager and Director of Facilities at the various brands.