

Let's Talk Trash

Susan Brown

Save money— and protect the planet— with strategic trash management

It's time to give trash areas the focus they deserve. Trash corrals are often the most forgotten place on the restaurant property, but the importance of a well-run trash area is a lot like the importance of having well-run restrooms for your customers and staff; everyone takes these services for granted until they're unavailable or not working. Then, watch out.

Facility professionals everywhere will tell you that issues in the trash corral blow up quickly, can be expensive and impact customer service. In extreme cases, they can cost a restaurant business revenue.

Here are some of the most common trash-related considerations for restaurants:

- Cost is a big one. Costs of trash service tend to rise annually. The best methods for getting costs under control are to reduce the number of service visits by using compaction equipment; ensure your location is “right sized,” meaning the number of service visits has been optimized for your location’s needs; and consider the services of a broker in order to get the lowest cost per lift. Brokers have purchasing power with the hauling community.
- Staff health and safety are always important. Trash bags are heavy. Asking your staff to lift heavy bags high over shoulder height or, even worse, climb stairs with them, is an accident waiting to happen. The risks include injury and lost staff time, soiled uniforms if bags leak or break, and messy waste clean-ups.
- Environmental issues cover a lot of area. If your equipment has any openings, gaps or lids that blow open or are left open by staff, you will attract pests, wasps, rodents and even neighborhood cats and raccoons. If you are in an area with bears, any opening in the waste equipment is bound to attract them. Equipment with openings, gaps or lightweight lids cause waste to blow around, creating a mess and increasing clean-up costs. Odor is another concern that impacts customers, staff and neighbors.

- Effective property management should always be a consideration. Do frequent service visits block your drive-through and cost the restaurant lost revenue? Is your trash area subject to unauthorized dumping? Do you want to avoid using valuable parking spaces to get more capacity for trash? Is your existing waste equipment easy to move if you make changes?

Equipment Selection Makes a Big Difference

Solving many of the common issues in the trash area often comes down to choice of equipment. In many cases, waste equipment is selected for one of the following reasons:

1. It was already there.
2. The hauler carries that brand.
3. The restaurant picked the equipment based on assumptions that are no longer valid.

The year 1936 marked the first commercial use of “the dumpster,” derived from the Dempster-Dumpster system of mechanically loading the contents of standard bins into garbage trucks. Roll-off containers are an evolution of the Dempster-Dumpster but generally are too expensive and too large for restaurant use. The next big equipment advance occurred in 1978, with the introduction of the vertical-style compactor. Verticals were followed by high-efficiency compactors that employ an improved design over vertical compaction and were introduced in the 2010s; these compactors address many of the shortcomings of the vertical compactor and of the standard trash bin.

A compactor makes good sense for a restaurant when the standard trash bins are being emptied three or more times per week. At this frequency, most restaurants should consider a compactor to reduce service requirements. Your hauler will give you a rate based on the weight of the trash and the time required to lift the load. With a compactor, the cost of a single pick-up may be higher than the cost to service a standard bin, but you will need fewer service visits.

The graphics on the next page demonstrate an example of service visits “saved” with two styles of compactors, compared to a standard six-yard bin.

The Equipment Payback Calculation

Most restaurants need to see a reasonable payback on a new equipment decision by offsetting direct cost savings against equipment rental or purchase costs. There may be other important

reasons for making an equipment change. Some examples include:

- Staff health and safety. If equipment has a high loading height and a staff member is injured by throwing out heavy trash bags, consider the related personnel costs in your payback calculation. Workplace health and safety data has shown that as much as 40 percent of workplace hazards come from musculoskeletal disorders caused primarily by hazards or risk factors in the workplace and incorrectly designed work or equipment. A further 19 percent of workplace hazards may come from slips, trips and falls. High loading heights, climbing to access equipment openings, and spills from broken trash bags create staff health and safety risks, as well as the associated lost-time costs.
- Property clean-up costs. Consider the costs to send staff out to clean up waste that has blown around the property or has been accessed by unauthorized individuals or animals. There is also a cost aesthetically in terms of customer service. If staff is used for this type of clean-up two or three times per week for one hour per occasion, it can become costly.
- General benefits related to property management. There are several benefits in this general category that may be applicable to some locations. These include:
 - Added waste capacity at the restaurant that does not require the use of existing parking spaces and provides additional capacity to cover service changes, interruptions or seasonal volume increases.
 - Drive-through interruptions are minimized due to fewer pickups. While service pickups can be scheduled during off hours, such as very early in the morning to avoid drive-through interruptions, this is not always an option.
 - Environmental issues such as odor and pest attraction to the property, including insects and birds, are minimized with a fully-enclosed compactor. These issues can cost a restaurant time and money through health department violations and customer service complaints.

The previous are examples of payback items to consider in addition to the direct savings in waste servicing when an equipment change, for example to a compactor from standard bins, is being considered. A site visit by an equipment specialist will help uncover additional savings potential.

To Compact Or Not to Compact?

As you review and assess your decision to add compactors, or remain with standard dumpsters, be sure to weigh the following factors:

- Compactors require power to the trash area. If your trash area or corral is at a distance from the restaurant, you will need to a power run. The cost is generally based on the distance from the electrical panel.
- Compactors incur ongoing utility costs. The good news, however, is that the cost to run today's high-efficiency compactors is minimal and generally not noticeable on a monthly utility bill.
- Maintenance costs, as with all equipment in your restaurant, need to be factored into your decision. A preferred option for many restaurants is a rental agreement that includes extended coverage on the equipment. Extended coverage is also available on purchased equipment.
- Rental agreements do cover multiple years—usually around four or five. The decision to rent or purchase largely depends on your company's cost of capital and preferred equipment acquisition plan.

Your Hauler and Equipment Changes

Today, most haulers can lift the variety of front-load equipment options, giving you the freedom to choose the equipment that works for your property. While your contract with your hauler for servicing and recycling trash allows you to make your own equipment decision, however, you should involve your hauler to ensure that they can access the equipment you select. The hauler's operations supervisor should visit the restaurant property to make certain there are no overhead obstructions when the new equipment is lifted.

In the past, restaurants often selected the equipment brand sold by the hauler. This option commits you to the hauler for the duration of the rental term on the equipment, which may be longer than the service agreement for the trash. This potentially lengthens the duration of your overall agreement with the hauler, costing you, and your broker if you use one, flexibility.

Another question often asked is, "Can I change equipment mid-contract?" In most instances, the contract is for servicing the trash and recycling, not for the equipment (assuming you have standard dumpster-style bins). Contracts generally allow for customer-owned equipment, so there should be no need to wait until the end of the existing servicing contract to change equipment.

The Last Word on Trash

Today, new, cost-effective equipment options address most of the common trash issues. Environmental responsibility logically tells us that compaction makes sense because it reduces truck trips and idling time. The benefit offered by today's waste equipment is that you can be socially responsible while also building a strong business case.

The future is bright with smart compactors that track the weight and fullness, giving you or your broker a more accurate window into savings and additional efficiencies. Trash has moved into the 21st century.

Susan Brown is National Accounts Manager for BINPAK Compactors and has been with the company from its inception in 2011. Brown's background in business development and national accounts management is extensive. She enjoys the challenge of solving business and waste-area challenges with better equipment options that make sense. She has authored other articles, as well as presented at conferences and to customers on solving some of today's common waste-area issues.