



WASTE MANAGEMENT From Trash to Treasure

For most restaurants, handling waste is easy because everything goes in the disposal or dumpster; as long as the drains are running clear and the dumpster is empty by the next morning, the system is working. But remember that “somebody’s trash is someone else’s treasure”. By changing your waste management practices, you can reduce the amount of garbage headed down the drain or to the landfill and put these wastes back to productive use. Depending on your contracts with scavengers, you may also be able to reduce your solid waste disposal costs.

Food Waste

Organic waste constitutes 24% of a restaurant’s waste stream. This organic waste includes non-contaminated edibles, food scraps and waste oils.

- Non-contaminated edibles: Leftover cooked food that cannot be held over or re-used in a different preparation should be donated when possible to local food banks that can pick up this food within hours. However, food banks have strict standards on accepting cooked food.
- Kitchen and table scraps. Kitchen and table scraps can be separately collected and composted by some outside waste handlers. In Chicago, the Resource Center will collect organic waste from restaurants for compositing, and eventually plans to



use the composted material in community gardens. Capturing organic waste from both food preparation and plates has some operating challenges. Steps to separating organic wastes in your restaurant include training your staff, having waste containers at all key locations (for example, prep tables and dishwashing stations) and storing organic waste in secure containers until it is picked up. One restaurant even keeps this waste in a walk-in refrigerator during warm-weather months.

- Waste oils. Waste cooking oils should not be poured down drains. This puts a strain on your drainage system and sewage treatment plants. Collect waste oil for pick-up by an oil recovery scavenger.

Recycling

The City of Chicago requires all restaurants and bars to have a recycling program involving at least three separate items unless one single item represents over 50% of your waste stream. Beverage containers and corrugated boxes are the bulk of most restaurants' packaging waste stream and can all be easily recycled. These should be source-separated in your bar, bussing, storage and prep areas. Here are a few tips on successfully implementing a recycling program in your restaurant:

- Serve fountain beverages and draft beer to reduce can and bottle waste.
- Have clearly labeled containers at all key work areas for each item you are recycling (bottles, cans, cardboard).
- Educate your staff on using these containers.
- Choose your scavenger service carefully. Many say that they separate and sell these recycled materials when in fact they don't. Ask for separate dumpsters for recyclables. Go to your scavenger's sorting facility and see what really happens to the trash. Or have a dedicated recycling service pick up these materials.
- Carefully review your scavenger contracts. Many of these contracts are quite restrictive and may limit your ability to use a separate service for picking up recyclables.