

Environmental Responsibility Best Practices	SUBJECT Waste Diversion		LAST UPDATE December 2022
	APPLIES TO • Suppliers • Distributors	FOCUS ON Solutions for diverting commercial waste from landfills	
	QUICK LINKS PPAI Environmental Responsibility: https://ppai.org/corporate-responsibility/environmental-responsibility/environmental-responsibility-resources/ Qima Sustainability Initiatives: https://www.qima.com/sustainability-corporate-social-responsibility Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): https://www.epa.gov/		Intended for intermediate compliance programs

There are numerous motivations and processes for diverting waste from landfills and incinerators. The motivations are clear, currently, only forty percent of waste in the United States is recycled, composted, or processed through methods not involving landfilling or incineration. There are over 3,000 active landfills in the United States and another 10,000 landfills that are no longer operational. These landfills, which establish the third largest human-caused source of methane, account for eleven percent of global methane emissions. Besides landfills, much of the waste goes into the ocean. Eight million tons of plastic waste end up in the world’s oceans every year. That is the equivalent of dumping a garbage truck into the ocean every minute. Diversion methods provide solutions to the waste problem, but not without presenting their challenges.

Much of the problem stems from our current linear economy that entails taking, making, consuming, and disposing of resources. This model has created numerous crises beyond the ones listed in this document. The ideal is to create a circular economy that invests in advanced technologies related to material science product design, recycling and manufacturing that leads to zero waste “closed loop” systems in which resources are not wasted. The elements of the loop entail production, usage, reduction, recycling, and reuse. Another description of this model prioritizes products that are “made to be made again.”

The motivations are also clear. There is a variety of environmental, health, and social problems relating to air and water pollution, soil contamination, habitat destruction, and human rights concerns caused by the most popular methods for discarding waste in the

U.S. and globally. Promotional products companies and their clients are also demanding solutions to the myriad problems associated with waste.

Solutions

Recycling

Recycling is the collecting and processing of waste that otherwise would have been thrown away, often to create a new product. This option presents tremendous opportunities, however it is not without its challenges. Recycling activities are often reliant on consumer behavior. Seventy-five percent of the American waste stream is recyclable, yet only thirty percent gets recycled. Specific to plastics, only five percent of plastic waste in the U.S. was recycled in 2021. While recycling reduces the need for raw materials, they are often cheaper than the recycled alternatives. The infrastructure for recycling waste is also lacking; materials recycling facilities (MRF) are not always easily accessible across the U.S. There is also mixed messaging regarding what items can and cannot be recycled. One concern in this area includes design, for example whether a product includes recycled content or whether the product is manufactured to be recyclable. Whichever category the product falls under, the result is a reduction in waste being directed to a landfill.

Composting

Composting is a controlled, natural decomposition of organic matter. This process is also referred to as biodegradation. One challenge confronting this solution is that commercial composting facilities are not available in all states, and the different facilities

accept varying materials for processing. Also, there are potential concerns for contaminating the soil depending on whether there are toxic chemicals, pesticides, or other harmful substances in the items sent to the composting operation. Although this option has its challenges, some facilities and consultants provide guidance on which items are acceptable. There are over 4,900 composting operations in the U.S. and more than twenty-five million tons of organic waste composted annually in the U.S.

Donations

Many companies have considered donating excess or unusable products. Americans generate sixteen million tons of textile waste each year and only sixteen percent of donated clothing is reused. This equates to one garbage truck of textiles being landfilled or incinerated every second. The challenges in this area include consumer behavior and lack of infrastructure to manage textile recycling. Even with attempts at reuse, 700,000 tons of used clothing is sent overseas annually, often to countries that lack the infrastructure for processing the donations. This often results in simply relocating the waste as opposed to reuse. One solution here involves a variety of apparel recycling companies, some of which are in the promotional products industry and are listed at the end of this document.

Take Back Programs

Take back initiatives are implemented to collect used products or materials from consumers and reintroduce them into the original processing and manufacturing cycle. These are also called buyback programs and examples include companies buying your waste in the plastics, apparel, and electronics categories, among others. Take back programs present useful opportunities for companies to connect with end users who have products they may be done using but do not know how to discard in a manner consistent with the circular economy.

Internal Waste Diversion

While executing an external waste diversion policy, it is also important to evaluate your internal practices. This can be accomplished by conducting a deep dive into waste generation points throughout your offices and facilities, a waste audit to

understand what comprises your company's waste stream, and developing a diversion program where materials are reduced, reused, or recycled. Some of the recycling or reuse goals may be accomplished through vendor partnerships with companies that recycle specific items such as pallets, pallet straps, stretch film, or bubble wrap.

B Corp Certification

[B Corp certified](#) entities are leaders in the global movement for an inclusive, equitable, and regenerative economy. Waste management is a significant component of the certifying body's impact assessment. There are 10 points to be gained in the waste management category in the B Corp certification program. The certification factors in this category include waste reduction targets and end of life considerations for the products and packaging, among others. This certification has recently become more prevalent, including some members of the promotional products industry.

TRUE Zero Waste Certification

The [Total Resource Use and Efficiency \(TRUE\) Certification](#) strives to change how an average ninety percent diversion of waste from landfills and materials flow through society toward a goal of all products eventually being reused and diverted from landfills, incineration (waste-to-energy), and the environment. TRUE certification eligibility requires incinerators. This certification is administered by the [Green Business Certification Inc.](#) and rates how well facilities perform in minimizing their non-hazardous, solid wastes and maximizing their efficiency in the use of resources.

Publicity

Prominently communicating your progress makes others aware the work your company has done in this area. For companies making declarations about eco-friendliness or sustainability, it is important to be able to substantiate those claims but is also important to promote your efforts. This can be done by centralizing eco-friendly products on your website's main page, making the information about these products easy to find, and creating awareness through press releases and email campaigns. Other methods of publicity include blogs centering on your sustainable products and making videos on how to recycle your products.

Actionable Steps

- Introduce sustainable products
- Use sustainable packaging
- Switch to eco-responsible shipping methods
- Partner with zero waste and closed-loop companies
- Provide end of life solutions to consumers
- Educate end-users
- Build a dedicated Green Team
- Become a Certified B Corporation
- Implement an internal waste management program

Apparel Recycling Solutions:

[Everywhere Apparel](#) 100% GRS-certified CirCot (“circular cotton”), recycled fabric; nothing virgin. “We want to change the way people think about promotional merch.”

[Patagonia](#) Tee-Cycle T-shirts; turning old shirts into new ones; 100% recycled material

[SWAG CYCLE](#) A startup that specializes in repurposing and recycling branding merchandise

[FOR DAYS](#) Recycling clothing. All brands welcome in any condition.

[The North Face](#) Clothes the Loop program

Online Resources:

PPAI Environmental Responsibility Resources:

<https://ppai.org/corporate-responsibility/environmental-responsibility/environmental-responsibility-resources/>

TRUE Guide To Certification:

<https://true.gbci.org/sites/default/files/resources/Guide%20to%20TRUE%20Certification.pdf>

EPA Waste Reduction Model (WARM):

<https://www.epa.gov/warm/basic-information-about-waste-reduction-model-warm#who>

EPA Sustainable Materials Management Basics:

<https://www.epa.gov/smm/sustainable-materials-management-basics>

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