

Recycling in Pennsylvania Hospitals and Health Care Facilities

Recycling at hospitals and health care facilities throughout Pennsylvania can make a positive impact on our environment and our local communities due to their large-scale resource consumption potential. Owners, operators, and clients of these establishments, working together with their local municipality, can implement and maintain a successful and impactful recycling program. Hospitals and health care facilities, in many instances, must manage various waste streams that includes dry materials received through their offices and patient rooms, and wet materials received through their food services and cafeteria operations. Additionally, these institutions must manage infectious and chemotherapeutic wastes that may be hazardous in nature, they have different waste requirements than other types of businesses. Please note that the recycling regulations do not apply to "red bag" waste. This material must be specially managed and should be handled as such.

Recycling is local in Pennsylvania - The Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling, and Waste Reduction Act of 1988 (Act 101) requires commercial, institutional, and municipal establishments located in Pennsylvania's mandated municipalities to recycle high-grade office paper, corrugated paper, aluminum, and leaf waste. In addition, establishments must recycle any other materials included in the municipality's recycling ordinance or regulations, which may include glass, newsprint, plastics, and/or steel and bimetallic cans. Businesses and institutions with facilities located within mandated municipalities must implement recycling programs according to local requirements, those not, are encouraged to recycle.

General municipal recycling requirements are as follows:

- All commercial, institutional, and municipal establishments must source separate the following materials:
 - High grade office paper;
 - Corrugated cardboard;
 - Aluminum cans;
 - Leaf waste; and
 - Any other recyclables that may be designated by the municipality.
- These establishments must arrange for the collection and recycling of all designated materials.
- All commercial, institutional and municipal entities must provide written documentation as to the type and weight of materials recycled annually. Reports are due to the municipality by January 31 of each year on a form provided by the municipality.

Steps for Successful Recycling in Hospitals and Health Care Institutions

Even though health care facilities must manage certain wastes very carefully, most of the same rules apply for managing all other wastes generated in these facilities. The challenge to good management is that unlike offices, restaurants, or other establishments that serve primarily a single purpose, these institutions must plan for a wide range of areas that encompass management of everything from office waste and cardboard to food waste and related materials. Here are some hints to help in planning:

1. Perform a waste assessment. Walk through the facility noting what type of waste is discarded in each area. A walk-through will help you determine which types of collection containers are needed. Typical programs are likely to involve some of the following:
 - **Administrative and office areas** - office paper, corrugated cardboard, other paper, cans, bottles, toner cartridges.
 - **Food service areas** - glass, metal, cans, plastic containers, corrugated cardboard (make sure that food waste is separated from recyclables).
 - **Public areas** - newspaper, magazines, bottles, cans.
2. Based on the results of the waste assessment, set up appropriate recycling programs in administrative offices, food service areas and waiting rooms. Unless a large amount of recyclable material is present, it may not be practical to collect recyclables from patient rooms and clinical areas.

3. Make sure that containers in public areas are well-marked. For these areas, it is best to choose containers with specialized openings, such as a hole for cans or a slot for newspapers. It is also important to place containers where the materials are generated to make recycling convenient.
4. Because of the high cost for processing/disposal, be sure that regular waste is not being disposed with red bag waste. Educate staff members about what does not belong in the red bags and make sure that regular trash containers are available in medical areas.
5. Inform employees about proper recycling procedures. Issue a memo, throw a kick-off party, and explain any separation procedures when you distribute containers. Make sure to follow up to ensure that procedures are being followed and further educate employees as necessary.
6. Set up a log book or a receipt system to record the volume of recyclables leaving the premises. This will enable you to receive proper compensation for your materials and to take appropriate action if volumes change.
7. Include recycling information in your orientation for new employees.
8. As you establish policies, explain the recycling program goals to your housekeeping staff for they will be very important to the success of your program and may provide you with key information helpful when finalizing your recycling policies. Train them by showing them what to do with new containers, how to collect waste separately, and where to take separated materials. For a 24-hour operation, plan pick-ups on appropriate shifts so that you do not have a problem with overflowing containers.
9. Ask for assistance from your housekeeping staff in monitoring the program. Have them inform you of areas with major contamination problems or where employees are not participating, and follow up with improved recycling education in these areas.
10. If appropriate, make sure that your grounds crew knows to keep yard waste separate from other waste.
11. Ask your waste hauler for advice about keeping recyclables and wet waste separate. Depending on the company's trucks and equipment, your hauler may want to give you separate containers for trash and recyclables.
12. Remind employees to keep food waste out of recycling containers and trash. Food waste should be handled separately from trash and recyclables. Where appropriate, your facility should consider composting this waste and/or recycling grease with renderers.
13. Hospitals and health care facilities that have establishments in multiple locations need to coordinate their recycling efforts with each local municipality where they operate. Each municipality may have different recycling processes – remember, recycling is local in Pennsylvania.

Hospitals and health care facilities, offices, restaurants, schools, retail operations, manufacturers, hotels, and other establishments each generate various types and amounts of wastes and have their own unique recycling opportunities. To learn more on how different types of establishments can implement a recycling program, please refer to our other Recycling Fact Sheets available at: <http://www.depgreenport.state.pa.us/elibrary/> (select Publications and then Waste Management). Though each workplace may have differences in the waste they produce and what they can recycle, all have the capability of significantly reducing what and how much waste is disposed in our landfills. By recycling they can also save energy and reduce carbon emissions, save natural resources, and limit operational costs. It is important that we all work together with our employers and local municipalities to implement and maintain a recycling program at our places of work.

For more detailed information about recycling in Pennsylvania, visit the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Waste Management, Recycling in Pennsylvania website at: <https://www.dep.pa.gov/Business/Land/Waste/Recycling>.