

Why Should I Bother: Waste Prevention in the Work Place

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Voice

I have a busy life. Deadlines. Demands. Too much to do and too many things to remember. With all the places I have to be and things I need to do, why should I worry about garbage too?

Narrator

The energy crisis, global warming, salmon recovery, clean air and clean water. Most of us care about these things. But the problems seem so big that it's hard for us to know what to do about them. It seems easier just to hope that someone, like the government or private industry or something, like a new technology, will take care of things for us.

But we are not powerless. Every day each of us makes decisions about how we use resources. We can choose to waste them or we can choose to use them wisely.

Garbage matters because it represents resources that are wasted. Take paper for example. Paper is the largest item in most office garbage. And transport packaging, including cardboard, is the largest item in some manufacturer's trash.

We take paper for granted but you might be surprised to learn what it takes to make paper. According to a recent study by Environmental Defense, producing a ton or 2,000 pounds of virgin copy paper requires 6,940 pounds of wood, 20,520 gallons of water and 38.4 million BTU's of energy and the manufacturing process produces tons of air and water pollutants and solid waste.

When we take steps to reduce our use of paper—be reformatting documents, not printing our our email, copying on both sides of the paper, buying reuseable packaging and reducing the size and number of our forms, we save all those resources. And paper is only one of the many items we use and waste every day.

Voice

But I'm just one person. What I do doesn't matter.

Narrator

It's easy to think that individuals don't make a difference, but any marketing expert will tell you that individual choice does matter. That's why businesses spend so much money on advertising.

Individual choice works like a rain storm. Think about each choice you make as a raindrop. As each drop falls it joins other drops. Soon you have a trickle, then a stream and eventually a flood that can change the course of an entire river.

Narrator

Although she uses a different analogy...Jane Krause, a surgical nurse at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital, knows first hand what a difference a concerned group can make.

Jan Krause-surgical nurse

I think everybody individually can apply a lot of pressure to companies. And a group you become a force and strength comes in numbers. And so every little bit helps in waste reduction...that if you take one pebble and throw it in the water. If you take a hundred pebbles and throw it in you have much more of an effect...and...I think that people can do a lot. If they're interested and motivated like this surgery staff at Good Samaritan we've proven that we can do a lot and we've been doing it almost ten years now...recycling and waste reduction at Good Sam.

Narrator

These are some of the things Jane and her co-workers at Good Samaritan hospital have accomplished.

Jan Krause-Good Samaritan Hospital

One of the things we did to reduce waste at Good Sam...one of the glove companies back in the 1990's decided to change their paper packaging of glove wrappers which we were recycling at the time changed it to plastic. We just came up in arms about the glove wrapper situation. So we decided to save... go ahead let's save all our wrappers...all our plastic wrappers and send them back to the company and make it their problem not our problem in waste reduction. So we did that. We saved 170 pounds of glove wrappers in one month. That's about 12 hundred pounds a year. And said we're not going to put up with this kind of packaging and please do something about it. They were very responsive. They came back a couple of months later with a nice letter and also reduced their package from this size in plastic to half the size in plastic. And it's much easier to store in volumes. It's much easier to handle the gloves and it's a safer delivery also in sterile technique on the table.

This is a sterile pack...custom pack in surgery...that has our sponges, section...everything we need to do an open heart case...this particular pack. We work with a company in customizing this to making it as lean as possible so we would not have any leftover waste what so ever. And in doing that we've saved 11 thousand pounds of waste a year and saved the hospital over 30 thousand dollars.

Narrator

And that surgery staff is not alone. Sam Armstrong, a sharp-eyed employee of plastic part manufacturer Nypro Oregon, realized that a few simple changes would make their dry air canisters reusable.

Sam Armstrong-Nypro Oregon

...that we use to dry our plastic that we process here. These canisters cost 600 dollars apiece. We use about 100 of them a month. We found by taking the four bolts out of the top and sliding the screen which contains the descant and drilling three little holes in here and draining the descant into a cardboard gaylord and then putting new descant in it and resealing it with bolts and then putting it back together and reusing it. To do that costs us \$1.57 compared to the \$600 that it cost to buy this one brand new. So 100 times 600 compared to 100 times \$1.57 is quite a substantial savings for the company and for the community.

Narrator

As Sam's story demonstrates, saving resources saves money too. It can also keep us healthier as artist John Maher discovered.

John Maher-Maher Fine Art

In terms of toxic reduction this spray adhesive is what I used to use to mount my prints. It's very nasty stuff. Bad for the lungs. Bad for the ozone. And I really wanted to find some way to replace it. What I found was a roll on adhesive...non toxic, archival...won't get brittle. Lasts forever. And there are no fumes from it. Just pour liquid in the back here. Rolls on to the print and it's ready to go.

Narrator

Preventing waste just feels good.

John Maher-Maher Fine Art

It makes me feel better. Rather than all these materials ending up in a land fill I'm making as much use out of them as I possibly can. And then they go to recycling rather than land fill. It's just better use of materials and resources. Makes me feel better about my business and what I'm doing on the planet.

Jeff Detlefsen-Detlefsen Law Office

We recognize in this office that our actions have a larger impact and feel good about the fact that we can operate and as a result of our waste reduction and recycling programs that air pollution will be reduced and water pollution will be reduced and energy consumption is reduced. And the stresses on the virgin resources are also replaced with a secondary material.

Telephone Operator

Thank you for calling Norm Thompson...my name is Anna. How can I help you?

Narrator

Retailer and catalog merchant Norm Thompson knows that preventing waste can make it a better place to do business.

Derek Smith-Norm Thompson

Sustainability is how we do business at Norm Thompson and all of our employees know that in fact that's the reason why they love to come to work here. We're charting the course to sustainability because it's the right thing to do, but we know there will be tremendous benefits for the environment for our bottom line for our employee moral for our customers who tell us this is an important thing ...that companies should be doing caring for the environment that serves them. And also our supply chain. We're recognizing that people actually want to do business with us because of what we stand for...

Narrator

The Corvallis Chamber of Commerce has proved that waste prevention can make an organization more efficient.

Patricia Mulder-Corvallis Chamber of Commerce

We have a thing called "just the facts" which is an update on city policy, politics, what's going on in the city in terms of the city council, boards and commissions. We've put that out every Friday afternoon. We used to do it on fax line. It took all weekend for a computer to churn this stuff out. We could only do it on Fridays cause it took so long. And it resulted in paper at the other end. Now we do almost two-thirds of it by email and we hoping to be completely electronic on it very, very soon. We can put it out anytime we want. If there's a breaking issue we can be on top of that. It's cheaper, it's faster and everybody's happy.

Narrator

Software designer Mentor Graphics put its annual report on the web. It now prints 5,000 fewer copies and the information is available at a click.

Kristen Beach-Mentor Graphics

Now with it being on the web we save in printing and shipping and handling costs. It's easier for our share holders to have access to us and for prospective shareholders to research our company.

Narrator

And waste prevention is good for the bottom line...

Derek Smith-Norm Thompson

At Norm Thompson what we want to do is prove that sustainability is the right thing to do not only for the planet but also for business—that the environment and the economy are in fact congruent not at odds at all. We have in the same year that we will reduce our waste in half we will contribute \$500,000 to the bottom line through sustainability efforts. And over the course of the next five years...as we reach our zero waste goal we will contribute \$5 million dollars to the bottom line.

Voice

Okay, I get the idea. We're all part of the big picture. But I can't devote my life to preventing waste. Is there something simple I can do?

Narrator

Sure. Rethink the way your firm uses everyday items like paper. Look at the packaging you receive from your suppliers and at the packaging you're sending your customers. Explore what is in your firms' trash and look for ways to reduce it.

The choices we make every day matter. Our actions have an impact on how clean we keep our water and our air. On how long our energy supplies will last. And on how cool we keep the planet. The world is ours. We can use it wisely or we can waste its bounty. The choice is yours. Just think of those rain drops.

Two short videotapes, *Beyond Recycling: Waste Prevention in the Office* and *Beyond Recycling: Waste Prevention in Manufacturing and Distribution* can give you lots of valuable ideas. They are available from your county Oregon State University Extension office or the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

To learn how to start your own waste prevention program, contact your city or county recycling coordinator or your Oregon Department of Environmental Quality regional office.