

RESTAURANT GUIDE TO WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



# PREFACE

The Integrated Waste Management Board is pleased to provide this copy of *Food for Thought: A Restaurant Guide to Waste Reduction and Recycling*. In the years since the City of San Francisco first developed this booklet, California has made outstanding progress toward reducing unnecessary disposal and has learned several important lessons along the way. Perhaps the most compelling lesson for business is the savings to be realized through waste prevention.

While waste reduction and recycling will lessen disposal costs, the largest economic benefits come from resource efficiency. Smart purchasing and effective use of supplies will save businesses the most money of all waste management practices. It's simply good business. Coupling the concept of resource efficiency with practices that recover and recycle usable goods makes a winning combination for your business and your community.

As you read this booklet, keep in mind that prevention of waste can be translated into profit for your business. The information contained herein can help you get started on the way to a better bottom line through reduced waste.

*The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the Board or its employees. The Board wishes to acknowledge the City of San Francisco's Solid Waste Management Program for developing this booklet and making it available for statewide distribution.*

**C**ommunities across the country are facing mounting solid waste disposal problems. While existing landfills across the state are quickly being filled to capacity, finding, opening and operating new ones is becoming increasingly more difficult and expensive. As landfill space decreases, the costs for landfilling our garbage will continue to grow, ultimately being passed on to businesses and residents in the form of higher disposal fees. Now, more than ever, reducing waste and recycling are smart tactics to incorporate into everyone's business policies. ❖ Restaurants can do a lot to minimize or reduce these potential cost increases by incorporating simple recycling and waste reduction programs and procedures that will eliminate much of the waste otherwise thrown away. Not only will this help save your business money, but will extend the life of landfills and save valuable energy and natural resources. ❖ Consumers are ever-increasingly aware of, and more willing to embrace, (both with their votes and their pocket books) solutions to the many environmental challenges we face today. It makes good economic and environmental sense for our restaurants to do so as well.

## WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE?

*Developed for food service establishments, this guide presents a variety of suggestions that restaurants can use to reduce the amount of garbage they throw away. The information presented in this guide is not meant to be, nor is by any means, complete. It is, however, a tool that we hope you will look at and use as food for thought on how your business can positively impact our environment and, potentially, your pocket book.*

*The guide is divided into two major sections. The first has tips and ideas on how you can reduce the amount of waste your restaurant throws away, as well as suggestions on what materials your business can recycle. The second section lists some of the many resources from whom you can get more information.*

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## WASTE REDUCTION TIPS AND IDEAS TO USE IN YOUR RESTAURANT

Faced with ever tightening profit margins, today's restaurants are constantly looking for ways to trim their costs. To do this operators and chefs continually look for ways to improve productivity and to minimize waste (or conversely, increase yield). Not surprisingly, employing these programs invariably creates the side benefit of less garbage being thrown out.

*REMEMBER, garbage disposal can be a controllable expense rather than a fixed one. All it takes is a plan and a concerted effort.*

This section offers suggestions and ideas on how restaurants can reduce the volume of their wastes through recycling and waste reduction activities. These ideas are not new. They originate from tried and true

programs dealing with reducing restaurant operating costs. In many instances your restaurant has already utilized one or more of these ideas. This section reintroduces these ideas with the added perspective that reducing your waste can and should go hand-in-hand with reducing your restaurant's operating costs.

Don't feel as if you have to do everything at once. We suggest that you pick areas from within this guide that are most applicable to your business and then expand from there. In many cases that might mean implementing one or two of the recycling tips, such as cardboard or glass recycling, then introducing other ideas later as part of a three, six, or twelve month program.

As a side note, you'll notice that some of these ideas will only apply to full-service restaurants, or conversely, to quick-service restaurants. Most, however, can be used interchangeably and apply either directly or indirectly with some operation in almost every

restaurant. To better help your search, the tips and ideas in this section have been divided into four general impact areas, including (1) purchasing, (2) product handling and storage, (3) food preparation, and (4) production and service areas.

## PURCHASING

### GENERAL IDEAS

- \* Demand that your purveyor's representatives keep you abreast of new and existing products that, while meeting your needs, are packaged in ways which can reduce the amount of material being disposed.
- \* Ask your purveyor to take back the shipping boxes for reuse and recycling.

### BEVERAGES

- \* Serve carbonated beverages from a beverage gun or dispenser (i.e., postmix) rather than by the bottle or can. If you have to use bottles, recycle them along with wine and liquor bottles. If you can or already do use a postmix system, ask for (if space permits) reusable syrup canisters rather than the bag-in-the-box alternative. This way the boxes don't get thrown into the garbage.

- \* Buy bar mixes in concentrate form, reconstitute and portion them into reusable serving containers rather than using ready-to-use mix.

- \* Buy and use dispenser beverages (e.g., juice, iced tea, hot chocolate) in concentrate or bulk form. Similarly, buy milk in the 5-gallon dispenser box, rather than by the half gallon.

- \* Buy your coffee by the whole bean and grind it on site.

### GROCERY ITEMS

- \* Use refillable condiment bottles and refill them from condiments purchased in bulk (e.g. four 1-gallon, 5-gallon foil pack) containers.

*DON'T ACCEPT, the status quo when looking at the purchasing process. Take the time to assess not only the way you buy supplies, but the products as well.*

- \* Use health department-approved, refillable **condiment dispensers** (e.g., cream for coffee, ketchup, etc.) instead of using portion-controlled packets whenever possible.
- \* Buy shelf-stable food supplies in bulk whenever sales volume and storage space justifies it. This minimizes unnecessary packaging and can cost less on a per-unit price, too.
- \* Consider buying pickles, mayonnaise, salad dressings, and the like, in containers other than the hard plastic pails or buckets. Almost all are available packaged in other containers including plastic-lined cardboard, cry-o-vac, or foil pouches.
- \* Buy meats in the bulk or uncut form and cut to size whenever the yield is equal to or greater, and the net cost is less, than if you were to buy it preportioned.
- \* Consider buying eggs shelled in bulk if your egg usage for general cooking or baking is 3 or more cases per week. Not only will it increase your yield (up to 30 percent of the egg white stays with the shell when raw eggs are shelled manually), but will eliminate broken eggs in the cooler and having to dispose of the shells and boxes.

## MEAT AND PRODUCE

- \* Consider buying your lettuce precut during those times of year when the precut cost is equal to (or less than) the true cost of the bulk product. To determine this, add the net unit cost of the bulk lettuce (i.e., cost per pound after prep) to the total labor cost (time spent doing the prep and cleanup plus time lost not doing other work) and compare it to the cost per pound of the precut product.

*ALWAYS consider durability as a cost criterion when buying small-wares and equipment (including janitorial supplies). If not considered, the least expensive product many times turns out to be the most costly.*

## PAPER SUPPLIES

- \* Ask for and purchase paper products made from recycled materials. Available items include toilet tissue, paper towels, napkins, place mats, bags (kraft), menus, and more.
- \* Styrofoam displaces in excess of four times the amount of storage and disposal volume than its paper equivalent does. Consider switching to paper packaging to reduce the volume of garbage being generated, if a large part of your garbage consists of foam containers.
- \* Use straw-style stir sticks for bar beverages instead of the solid style. They cost less per unit and use less plastic. Additionally, use only one straw per drink.



- \* **Serve straws from health department-approved dispensers rather than offering them pre-wrapped.** At the same time, consider purchasing straws with a smaller hole-size than the ones you are currently buying.
- \* **Use reusable coasters** (or nothing at all) instead of paper napkins when serving beverages from the bar.

## JANITORIAL AND RESTAURANT SUPPLIES

- \* **Use reusable table linen and dinnerware** (including china, glass, and silverware).
- \* **Use roll-type paper towels (unbleached ones are best and least expensive) in your restrooms and at hand sinks instead of pre-cut towels.** Better yet, consider using hot-air hand dryers.
- \* **Use cloth cleaning towels rather than the paper equivalents.** If this is not an option, consider using handi-wipe style of disposable towels. Whichever way you choose, rinse and sanitize both types of towels regularly.
- \* **Consider using plastic trashcan liners made of recycled HDPE instead of ones made of LDPE or LLDPE.** They contain fewer raw materials, work equally as well (or better) for

most uses, and generally cost less, too.

- \* **Purchase cleaning supplies in concentrate,** rather than in ready-to-use (RTU) form; then portion them into properly labeled dispensing bottles. When you buy cleaning supplies in RTU form, you're paying for the water with which the cleaning agent has been mixed. Using concentrates saves you that cost, as well as the space the multiple RTU packaging requires on the shelf and, ultimately in the garbage can.
- \* **Use multipurpose cleaners** that can be used for all types of surfaces rather than cleaners that are job-specific (e.g., stainless steel cleaner). Whenever possible, consider using cleaning agents that are either the least toxic or nontoxic in nature.
- \* **Use cleanable and reusable hats for kitchen employees instead of disposable paper ones.**

*It's NOT uncommon to find products packaged in more than a half dozen different sizes or ways. By working with your suppliers, inevitably you will find alternatives that not only meet your needs, but potentially cost less and also reduce the amount of garbage produced.*

## PRODUCT HANDLING & STORAGE

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*ATTENTION TO, and prevention of, spoilage and unnecessary waste starts at the time the product rolls through your kitchen door. It stops only when you're able to fully maximize their preparation and use.*

- \* **Check your produce deliveries carefully for rotten or damaged product.** Return any substandard product. Do not sign the delivery tag until the contents of every box have been inspected and approved.
- \* **Rotate perishable stocks at every delivery to minimize waste due to spoilage.** Use the back-to-front system where new product is placed on the back (or bottom) of the shelf, while the older product is rotated to the front (or top). Additionally, date all products on the day you received them so if they get mixed up you can still recognize the newer product from the old.
- \* **Clean your cooler(s) and freezer(s) regularly to ensure that food has not fallen behind the shelving and spoiled.** This should include both reach-ins and walk-ins.
- \* **Arrange your refrigerated and dry storage areas** to facilitate easy product access and rotation. This will help minimize waste due to spills, breakage, and spoilage.
- \* **Store and/or handle unwrapped paper supplies (e.g., drink cups, napkins or bags) so as to prevent the products from inadvertently falling on the floor.**
- \* **Store raw vegetables (in addition to other perishables) in reusable airtight containers to prevent unnecessary dehydration and spoilage.** Also, store produce (especially leafy vegetables) as far away from the condenser unit as possible to prevent freezing. Never store tomatoes and lettuce in the same container or close to each other. Tomatoes emit a gas that will turn lettuce brown.
- \* **Reconstitute stalky vegetables (e.g., celery, lettuce, carrots, broccoli, etc.) that have wilted** by trimming off the very bottom part of the stalk and immersing them in warm water (100° F) for fifteen to twenty minutes.
- \* **Wrap freezer products tightly and make sure they are used in a timely fashion, to minimize waste due to freezer burn.** Code-date all product stored in the freezer and rotate properly.
- \* **Donate any extra food to a food bank.**



## FOOD PREPARATION & STORAGE

- \* **Adjust inventory levels on perishables to minimize waste due to spoilage or dehydration.** If you are constantly throwing out coded dairy products or dried-up lettuce, it might be because you're stocking too much inventory and/or it's not being rotated properly. Check your usage levels to see if you need to adjust either the quantity or frequency of your orders.
- \* **Develop and use hourly or daily production charts to minimize over-prepping and unnecessary waste.**
- \* **Whenever possible, prepare foods to order to minimize waste due to over-preparation.**
- \* **When prepping food, only trim off what is not needed.** Over-trimming typically occurs in the preparation of bulk meats and whole vegetables. Check the garbage can for tell-tale signs or ask that all trimmings be put into a holding container (for review) prior to disposal. If too much trimming is observed or required, retrain your prep staff, change the product's specification or size to minimize unnecessary waste, or buy it already preportioned.
- \* **Use vegetable and meat trimmings for soup stock.**
- \* **Evaluate and adjust the size of your meal portions if you find they are consistently being returned unfinished.** Offer customers smaller portions and price menu items accordingly.
- \* **Pre-cool steam-table hot foods (in an ice bath) before placing them in the cooler.** Similarly, always place hot foods into clean, shallow containers before storing in the cooler. This helps prevent premature spoilage and keeps your cooler from working overtime to keep things properly refrigerated.
- \* **Reuse leftover cream-based sauces and soups (that have been held and stored at proper temperature) within two days of when they were originally prepared to prevent waste due to spoilage.** This also applies to leftover poultry and fish-based menu items.
- \* **Store leftover hot foods from different stations in separate containers rather than consolidating them to minimize the chance of spoilage.**

*ALMOST 30 PERCENT of most restaurants' garbage is made up of food waste. Much of this can be reduced through proper purchasing, handling, preparation and storage. With the State law mandating a 50 percent reduction of our waste stream by the year 2000, the time to get started is now!*

# PRODUCTION & SERVICES AREAS

## EQUIPMENT

- \* Develop and implement a monthly cleaning and maintenance program for all your equipment.
- \* Keep refrigeration in good running order to prevent unnecessary spoilage resulting from broken equipment. This also extends the life of the compressors and reduces energy costs as well.
- \* Check the syrup-to-water (brix) calibration on your beverage dispenser(s) at least twice a week. Adjust as necessary. Similarly, clean the heads and dispenser tips on all your beverage machines daily. This helps ensure consistent beverage production quality and quantity.
- \* Keep oven equipment (especially for baking) calibrated to prevent over-baked products.

### PROMOTE

*your environmental activities to your customers. Not only will they appreciate your efforts and concern, but they may potentially increase their patronage as well.*

\* **Clean your fryers and filter the oil daily. This extends the life of both the fryer and the oil.** Built-up carbon deposits on the bottom of the fryer act as an insulator, which forces the fryer to heat longer thus causing the oil to break down sooner.

- \* Use a test kit supplied by your grocery distributor (rather than eyeballing it), to determine when to change your fryer oil.

## BACK-OF-THE-HOUSE

- \* Create incentives for staff to reduce the breakage or loss of your restaurant's china, glass, and silver supplies.
- \* Place rubber mats around bus and dishwashing stations to further reduce china and glass breakage. It also minimizes injury resulting from slippage.
- \* Have employees use permanent-ware mugs or cups for their drinks.
- \* Minimize excess use of trash bag liners by manually compacting the trash in your garbage cans as completely as possible and emptying the cans only when they are full. Additionally, consider purchasing a garbage compactor for your restaurant to reduce the volume of material ultimately placed in the disposal container.
- \* Check for discarded permanent-ware (e.g., serving trays, silverware, etc.) before throwing out dining room trash.

## FRONT-OF-THE-HOUSE

- \* **Distribute condiments, cutlery, and accessories from behind the counter instead of offering them self-serve.** Train your counter staff to dispense a predetermined quantity of these products for any meal or when requested by guests.
- \* **Use serving containers in sizes that meet the portion needs of your menu items without having excess packaging material.** A good example of this is the restaurant that uses both 8 oz. and 12 oz. soup cups for their two serving sizes rather than just serving both sizes in the 12 oz. container.
- \* **Minimize the use of unnecessary extra packaging (e.g., double wrapping, double bagging, etc.) of take-out foods.** Establish packaging standards for every menu item (and combination of items) and let your staff know it's important to follow them. Remember, every extra bag or piece of wrap they use is money out of your pocket and more garbage in the dumpster.
- \* **Use less packaging for eat-in foods than for food being taken out, or use none at all.**

## RECYCLING ACTIVITIES

- \* **Set-up a rendering service for your waste grease, fat, or used cooking oil.**
- \* **Set up a cardboard and/or glass recycling program with one of your local collectors.**
- \* **Place a recycling bin in the bus station for your customers' empty beverage containers, if you have to serve beverages in cans and bottles.**
- \* **Donate empty plastic pails or buckets to schools, nurseries, or churches; give them away, or sell them to your customers.**
- \* **Donate old uniforms to thrift shops.**

*DON'T FORGET, to ask your staff for their input and assistance on what and how things can be done to minimize your waste and reward them for good ideas. Including them in the decision-making process can pay dividends in higher productivity, better morale, lower costs, and most importantly, less waste!*

# SELECTED RESOURCES

## **California Restaurant Association**

343 Sansome St. Suite 700  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
(415) 782-3650  
Fax (415) 782-3654

3435 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 2230  
Los Angeles, Ca 90010  
(800) 794-4272

## **California Integrated Waste Management Board**

8800 Cal Center Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95826  
(916) 255-2200  
[www.ciwmb.ca.gov](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov)

For business waste reduction information:

(916) 255-2354  
[bzassist@ciwmb.ca.gov](mailto:bzassist@ciwmb.ca.gov)

## **California Department of Conservation**

Division of Recycling  
801 K Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 323-3743

## **Center for Development of Recycling**

Dept. of Environmental Studies  
One Washington Square  
San Jose, CA 95192-0204  
(800) 533-8414  
Outside Santa Clara county (408) 924-5453

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# LOCAL CONTACTS

# NOTES

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