

Creating A Litter-Elimination Program For Your Business

WHY IT MATTERS: We can't thank you enough for your interest in being a waste-reduction trendsetter! Here in Brevard County, the local business community has great power to limit the amount of litter in our area's beautiful waterways and natural spaces. And thanks to our proximity to the ocean, the actions we take here can have **positive impacts** worldwideⁱ.

Both locally and globally, plastics and polystyrene represent some of our biggest challenges, when it comes to litter. One piece of plastic takes **500-1,000 years**ⁱⁱ to break down, while polystyrene (Styrofoam) can stay in the environment for **1 million years**ⁱⁱⁱ or longer.

But by reducing the amount of single-use plastics and Styrofoam packaging we use in daily food service and business activities, we can have a real impact. In some cities, studies found that **49 percent**^{iv} of litter resulted from to-go food service items, which presents an exciting opportunity. Just imagine the impact we can all make through our business choices if we work together to reduce litter!

BENEFITS FOR MEMBER BUSINESSES:

- A Litter Quitter window sticker notifying potential customers of your sustainability commitment
- Promotional listings on the websites of program partners and social media
- Mentions of your company in press releases to local media outlets and promotion of your company at public outreach events
- Group pricing discounts on sustainable product lines from major supply distributors o Aardvark, Eco-Products, and Edward Don & Co.
- Networking and education opportunities via local sustainability summits. Done annually, it is a great way to bring support to your business!
- An annually organized "day of support" driving new customers to your business
- Litter Quitter members can include their certification as a practice in the Indian River Lagoon Green Business pledge.

KEY CONCEPTS: Minimizing your company's litter output comes down to the familiar waste-reduction adage of "**reduce, reuse, recycle.**"

To reduce the amount of plastics and polystyrene your customers use, you can either **choose not to distribute** certain items, like lids, straws, plastic utensils and paper napkins, or you can **give customers the option to forgo** those items by making them self-service or asking before handing them out.

Plastics and polystyrene litter can also be reduced by switching to products made of **alternative materials** that will **degrade more quickly** if they find their way into local natural areas. For example, a paper cup can degrade in as little as 1-2.5^v months, while a polystyrene cup will persist for many millennia.

Most single-use items, such as straws or plastic cutlery, are also easily replaced with **reusable options** for in-store use that cut back on waste while saving you money, too. And last but not least, you can incorporate recycling into your business in a variety of important ways.

Provide **recycling bins** for your customers on-site, and when you must use single-use items instead of reusable options, choose items made from **recycled and recyclable materials**. These items have been saved from becoming litter once already and can be repurposed again, given the chance!

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES: To get you started thinking like a Litter Quitter, here are a few examples of problematic products and ways you can address the issues ...

SINGLE-USE PLASTIC STRAWS

THE FACTS: American's use **500 million plastic drinking straws** each day, an average of 1.6 straws per person, per day. That amount could fill 125 school buses^{vi}. Straws are a **frequent component of beach litter**, and like all single-use plastics, they are a petroleum-based product^{vii} that can take a thousand years to break down. They are also **not recyclable** in Brevard County^{viii}.

In many restaurants, straws are one of the only non-reusable items used for dine-in food service, and most frequently, straws are automatically included with each drink served. However, studies have shown that **50 to 80 percent of customers** declined a straw when offered, so by simply asking your customers before handing out straws, you can **cut your plastic straw usage in half or more**, preventing litter while also saving your business money^{ix}.

Consider implementing an **"ask-first" straw policy** at your restaurant or remove plastic straws from your business altogether by replacing them with **reusable alternatives** for dine-in service. And in situations where you must provide a straw, such as a to-go order where a customer has specifically asked, consider using a **paper straw** that will at least biodegrade quickly if it becomes litter.

REPLACEMENT PRODUCT EXAMPLES

Reusable Straws:

- Glass, Steel, Plastic: <http://www.greenmunch.ca/reusable-straws/>
- Bamboo: <http://www.bambuhome.com/products/bamboo-straws>
- Glass, Plastic, Steel, Bamboo: <http://www.reuseit.com/rusearch.htm?tSearch=straw>
- Glass: https://www.strawesome.com/classics-glass-straws/?subcats=Y&features_hash=V4757

Paper Straws: (Recommended for to-go drinks only)

- <http://www.sustyparty.com/collections/straws/products/straws-red>
- <http://www.aardvarkstraws.com/ordering/buy-food-service-straws-now>
- <http://www.kikkerland.com/products/paper-straws+-blue-144-per-box/>

TO-GO CONTAINERS, UTENSILS AND BAGS

THE FACTS: Plastic and polystyrene (Styrofoam) products, which are also a type of plastic, **never fully degrade** in the environment. Instead, they simply break down into smaller pieces. So, in our oceans, these non-degradable plastic and Styrofoam products have formed massive **floating islands of garbage**, along with aquatic clouds of microplastic featuring 750,000 tiny bits of plastic in a single square kilometer.

Countless **marine animals**, like endangered loggerhead sea turtles, die from ingesting these plastics, which they mistake for food, and all the while, plastics continuously leach and absorb **harmful chemicals** that then enter the food chain. **Plastic bags and Styrofoam cups** are among the most common components of this oceanic garbage^x, and even when properly disposed of, Styrofoam to-go cup and containers and plastic bags are **not recyclable** in Brevard County facilities^{xi}.

“Compostable” alternatives to these products will only biodegrade in commercial composting facilities, which the county does not have. So give customers the option to **bring their own cups or Tupperware** for to-go items and simply carrying their items out of the store instead of automatically being provided with a bag. When you must provide packaging, choose an option that is sustainable and will biodegrade quickly, such as **recycled paper products**, or at the very least, use only plastic products that are recycled and recyclable. The same goes for utensils, and be sure to avoid the extra plastic waste of bundled wrapped utensils.

REPLACEMENT PRODUCT EXAMPLES

- Recycled paper boxes: <http://www.treecycle.com/catfoodservice.html>
- Recycled cardboard pizza box: <http://www.prattplus.com/browse/packaging/corrugated-cardboard/corrugated-boxes/8-pizza-box-takeout-container-pra1308?gclid=Cj2b24yCpslCFXAS7AodZjsADQ>
- Recycled paper bags: <http://www.treecycle.com/catbag.html>
- Recycled paper cups and recycled plastic lids: <http://www.webstaurantstore.com/579/green-recycled-paper-hot-cups-and-lids.html>
- Recycled plastic cups: <http://www.webstaurantstore.com/645/green-recycled-and-biodegradable-plastic-cold-cups.html?vendor=Dart-Solo>
- Plant-based fiber: <http://begreenpackagingstore.com/>
- Recyclable foil containers: <http://www.foodservicewarehouse.com/disposables/aluminum-food-containers/c15578.aspx>

NAPKINS

THE FACTS: An EPA study in 2012 found that paper and paperboard constituted the third largest portion of discarded **municipal solid waste**, after food waste and plastics. That year, Americans threw away almost **25 tons of paper**, but each ton of paper recycled could save the equivalent of 165 gallons of gasoline^{xii}. A study in 2013 showed that American diners use an average of about **3 paper napkins** per meal, but that same study showed that the majority of **Americans prefer cloth** napkins at sit-down restaurants.^{xiii}

So, if your restaurant has the ability to do laundry, consider using **reusable napkins** instead of disposable ones. If not, switch to a napkin dispenser engineered to release only **one napkin at a time**. This will cut down on your customers’ napkin waste by up to 30%^{xiv}, and therefore, your napkin expenses. Also be sure to use **100% recycled paper** napkins to avoid putting strain on virgin forest resources. And remember, food-soiled napkins are not recyclable, but they are compostable^{xv}.

REPLACEMENT PRODUCT EXAMPLES

- Dispenser: <http://www.synergyconsultants.com/stop-napkin-waste-at-your-restaurant/>
- Dispenser: http://www.gppro.com/category_napkins.aspx
- Recycled paper: <http://shop.seventhgeneration.com/napkins/>
- Recycled paper: <http://letsgogreen.biz/pages/paper/napkins.html>
- Recycled paper: <http://www.ecoproductsstore.com/napkins.html>
- Reusable: <http://www.webstaurantstore.com/33753/cloth-napkins.html>

ⁱ <http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/marinedebris.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.takepart.com/oceans/plastic-pollution>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://recycle.uoregon.edu/Factoids.htm>

^{iv} <http://www.triplepundit.com/2011/06/fast-food-big-source-trash-pollution/>

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- v <http://recycle.uoregon.edu/Factoids.htm>
- vi http://www.nps.gov/commercialservices/greenline_straw_free.htm
- vii <http://www.local10.com/news/Miami-Beach-bans-drinking-straws/11222922>
- viii <http://wfit.org/post/brevard-county-solid-waste-talks-recycling>
- ix http://www.nps.gov/commercialservices/greenline_straw_free.htm
- x http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/encyclopedia/great-pacific-garbage-patch/?ar_a=1
- xi <http://www.brevardcounty.us/solidwaste/recyclinginformation>
- xii http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/2012_msw_fs.pdf
- xiii <http://www.ramw.org/blog/study-shows-us-consumers-prefer-cloth-napkins>
- xiv http://www.gppro.com/category_napkins.aspx
- xv https://alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/magazine/article/?article_id=29080