

INFOSHEET

Green Business is Good Business

GREENERFUTURES

The 4 R's

Introduction

There are only two ways to make money in business: one is to increase income, the other is to reduce costs. The 4R's help you reduce your costs and make your business greener both environmentally and economically.

Reduce

At the top of the waste management pyramid are practices that aim at reducing or eliminating waste. All stages of business operations including production and marketing are potential sources of environmental waste and consequent economic losses. A critical area for waste reduction is packaging since changes here can be made without the expenses associated with retrofit. Cylindrical packages, whose height and diameter are equal, have the best surface area to volume ratio so they can hold maximum product while using a minimum in packaging materials. Reductions in energy consumption may require equipment upgrades or building improvements but, with high energy costs, this usually means a quick payback. If financing is a problem, energy performance contracting can be used. An environmental company will do the refit and take the energy savings to pay off the costs over a specified period. Paper usage can be reduced by double sided copying, mistake proofing before printing, and reducing margins and line spacings.

Reuse

Much of what does not go directly into the product itself can be reused. This includes raw materials packaging, the pallets used in delivery, water, machine oils and communications materials. With treatment, water and machine oils can be reused in the production process. Raw materials packaging and shipping pallets can be reused for product shipment. Waste paper can be used as padding in packaging, notepaper or for draft copies of inter-office memos.

Recycle

Besides beverage containers and office paper, materials used in production can often be recycled as well. It may require a little more research to find someone who can recycle the by-products of your production process but partnerships built around by-product synergy are becoming increasingly common. Florida Power and Light is just one example of a company that saves money by giving away the by-products of its own production for use in another company's production. Creative in house recycling has been an effective cost saving measure for Canadian Maritime Engineering, as they turn their used parts in to new machinery for their production line.

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Recover

Sometimes the production process allows useful materials to be passed on as environmental waste. One example would be the chemicals used in printing. These can be recovered from the waste stream and used again in production. Heat recovery is another money saving goal that is becoming more common as technology improves. Heat from production equipment can be recovered and used to heat offices or to preheat water needed for cleaning or production.

Some Questions to Think About

How can the four R's be applied in your business?

Which would be the most difficult to apply?

Does your municipality have programs that would help you implement a waste reduction strategy based on the four R's?

Two case studies are references in this info sheet. What effect did following the 4 R's have on these businesses?

Some literature lists a fifth R—Rethink. What role does this R have in the development of a waste reduction strategy?