

GREENING YOUR WORKPLACE

A USER-FRIENDLY GUIDE
TO ACHIEVING OFFICE
WASTE SUSTAINABILITY



National Recycling Week

(13-19 November 2023)

is here, and what better time is there to win the war on waste within your own business?

Improving waste management in your office is a smart business move that comes with a long list of benefits. Of course, you'll reduce your footprint, improve your business' sustainability outcomes and create a positive impact on the environment.

But implementing smarter, sustainable waste management strategies can also:

1. **Reduce your business costs.** By reducing the amount of waste you pay to dispose of.
2. **Improve your brand reputation.** Consumers are increasingly looking to support eco-conscious businesses.
3. **Increase employee retention and morale.** Many staff are drawn to work for businesses that focus on generating positive sustainability outcomes.

Most importantly, implementing a sustainable waste management plan will future proof your business.

As public concern over environmental issues continues to grow, governments will update legislation to reflect this concern. Having a well-constructed, sustainable waste plan will **ensure you stay ahead of the pack** and allow you to proactively meet legislative requirements while living up to the expectations of consumers in the future. It's about setting yourself up for long-term success.

THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU DEVELOP A SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT PLAN THAT WORKS FOR YOUR BUSINESS.



HOW TO DEVELOP A SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT PLAN IN FOUR SIMPLE STEPS

STEP 1

Get to know your waste.

The start of *any* good plan is **identification**. You need to know your enemy, or in this case, your waste, to be able to tackle it head on. By taking the time to gather the key information about your waste BEFORE you develop your waste plan, you can set goals based on facts rather than guesswork – meaning less confusion, and a much higher chance of successful outcomes.

You can manage this process internally by **completing a basic waste audit**. This means sorting through your rubbish and making a list of the waste being generated in your office, following these six steps:

1. **Assemble** a team
2. **Determine** your primary waste categories
3. **Collect** your tools (e.g. a bathroom scale if you plan on weighing your waste for accuracy)
4. **Sort** your rubbish into categories (wearing the appropriate PPE and following all necessary safety protocols)
5. **Weigh** and/or record your rubbish
6. **Analyse** your findings

When sorting your waste into categories, look out for these common office waste culprits:

- **Paper waste**, including printer paper, envelopes, cardboard, and packaging
- **Single use plastics** like water bottles, straws, cling wrap, food containers, zip lock bags, disposable cups and cutlery, coffee cups
- **Food scraps**, including coffee grounds and tea bags
- **E-waste** including batteries, charger cables, keyboards and computer mice
- **Misc. office waste**, like printer cartridges
- **Other recyclable items** that have ended up in the general waste bin, e.g. glass bottles and soft-drink cans

Don't forget to take remote working arrangements and any special or one-off events into account. It's critical to plan for these to minimise waste and maximise your sustainability outcomes.



STEP 2

Make it a group activity.

No single person is responsible for generating – or reducing – waste. It takes many small individual actions to create a waste problem, and it takes many small individual actions to **solve** a waste problem.

So, it's vital that you **involve key stakeholders in the office waste reduction journey**, *before* you begin to develop your waste plan.

Start with your internal team:

1. **Have a chat** with staff to understand their waste habits, get to know what *they* think the biggest problems are, and discuss how you might solve them together.
2. **Create an (anonymous) survey** to send to all staff. This could include a list of questions asking the same questions as above, but you might find people are more open about their waste habits in an anonymous context.
3. **Complete a waste and recycling knowledge quiz** together – you can **use a tool like Kahoot!** to make it an engaging team activity and encourage healthy competition. Use the data to assess where the knowledge gaps are. This can guide future educational activities and highlight where staff may need extra support when you roll out your waste plan.

No matter what brilliant ideas you have to improve your waste management, you can't implement them without the cooperation of external stakeholders and service providers.

Ensure your waste management plan runs smoothly by first speaking with:

- **Your building manager** to find out how waste is currently managed in your building. Ask what options there may be for improvement.
- **The cleaning crew** to ensure they can manage potential updates to waste collection and sorting in the building.
- **Waste contractors** to find out where your waste goes once it's picked up, and if they have more sustainable options available.



STEP 3

Develop an achievable waste plan.

Congratulations! You've identified your primary waste offenders, assessed your staff's waste knowledge, and engaged with the key stakeholders in your building; now that you've done the necessary background work, **it's time to start developing your waste plan.**

Start by brainstorming strategies as a team to better manage the categories of waste that you're producing the most of.

Strategies might include removing the source of waste, reducing it, setting up a waste system with recycling bins for soft plastics, food scraps, e-waste and more, or finding a recycling service.

Once you've decided on your primary waste reduction strategies, draft SMART goals to ensure your plan is **realistic and achievable**:

1. **Specific:** Identify the key waste reduction outcomes you'd like to achieve and make them specific. Identify who will be responsible for each goal. Example:
 - We throw out 30kg of food scraps each week. I will set up two food waste bins, one in the kitchen and one in the lunchroom, to reduce this waste. I will organise for the food waste to be collected on Friday each week. All staff will use these bins for their food scraps and coffee grounds.
2. **Measurable:** Set the metrics and tools you will use to measure your success. Example:
 - We will reduce our food waste by 75% (from 30kg to 7.5kg or less per week). We will measure this by sorting and re-weighing our food waste in 3 months and again in 6 months.
3. **Attainable:** Identify the tools and/or skills your team needs to achieve your goals. If you don't currently possess those tools/skills, identify what it will take to attain them. Example:
 - I will install clear signage near the food waste bins to inform staff of what they can/cannot put in these bins. I will involve all staff in a training session to ensure they have the necessary understanding of the food waste problem, the solution we've installed, and what they are responsible for. I will provide additional training as needed.
4. **Relevant:** Consider why setting this goal is relevant now, and what timely objectives it will help your business meet. Example:
 - Reducing our office waste is a key goal to meet our sustainability target for FY24.
5. **Time-Bound:** Set an achievable deadline to reach your specific goal. Example:
 - We will achieve our goal to reduce food waste by 75% by June 2024. To achieve this, I will install food waste bins and roll out signage and training by 20 December 2023. We will reweigh food scraps in March, and again in June.

Set SMART goals like this for each category of waste you'd like to reduce in your office. Make clear who is responsible for what, and ensure the relevant people are informed of their task/s and the deadlines to achieve them.



STEP 4

Track your waste reduction progress.

Once your plan is up and running, you'll need to track your waste reduction progress and tweak as needed. It's easy to set and forget a waste management plan and assume everyone is playing their part, but your initiatives need to be monitored closely and regularly for a successful result.

You'll need to:

1. **Regularly check office bins** to ensure staff are using the correct bins for each type of waste; just a visual check is enough week-to-week to give you a general idea of your progress.
2. **Check in with staff** after installing new waste systems, to check if they have identified any barriers to using the systems effectively. This could be in a staff meeting, or via an anonymous email poll. Check in regularly at defined intervals to identify any new problems.
3. **Collect feedback** from your cleaning team and waste contractors. Ask if they've noticed any reduction in waste or changes in your office waste habits.
4. **Continue to track and audit your waste** for measurable insight into your progress. If you notice progress is slow, consider where the issue is stemming from, then tweak your plan or provide additional training and support for staff as needed.

While tracking your progress, it's equally important to **report on the progress of your waste management**. **Demonstrating your progress towards sustainable office waste management is a great way to keep staff motivated and illustrate to consumers or customers that you're genuinely dedicated to improving sustainability in your business.**

To go a step further, you can hire our NABERS* Accredited Waste Assessor to provide a NABERS Waste Rating, which you can proudly display on your building to promote your commitment to sustainability.

* National Australian Built Environment Rating System



NEED SOME ADVICE?

Green Connect Zero Waste Services can kickstart your sustainable office waste management goals.

Our team of Zero Waste experts can help you understand your waste, clean it up, and reduce it. All while creating jobs for young people and refugees who face barriers to employment. We've been doing this for over 10 years, guiding some of Australia's biggest companies, events, and councils towards their Zero Waste future.

We provide a range of services targeting all stages of the waste lifecycle and tailor them to meet your specific needs. Including:

- Waste Audits
- Zero Waste Events
- Litter Picking
- Waste Consulting
- Providing a NABERS Waste Rating or Waste Verification report

Contact us today on (02) 4243 1537 or fill out an enquiry form on our website to chat with one of our experts. green-connect.com.au/zero-waste-services



Green Connect is a national social enterprise and not-for-profit that creates employment opportunities for people with barriers to employment, including young people, refugees, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, through our Zero Waste Services, Workforce Solutions, urban permaculture farm, and Op Shops. By hiring our services or purchasing our products, you're supporting us to create positive outcomes for people and planet.



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