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Going Green Benefits Business

There is a growing need for businesses to “go green” in more comprehensive ways. Many businesses have made changes like recycling paper and toner cartridges, cutting back on air conditioning, heating, and lighting, and creating car and van pools for employees. But there is much, much more that businesses can do.

Making a commitment to preserving the environment and reducing landfill waste is not only the right thing to do, it is also good business. According to Gary Hirshberg, “nature and business are born allies—potentially the richest partnership in the history of capitalism.” (Hirshberg 1) Recycling services can cost less than traditional waste collection services. Many customers and clients seek out “green” businesses and use environmental-friendliness as criteria for selecting their business partners. Research shows that employee retention and recruitment can also benefit through cost savings and good will. For many employees, working for a “green” company is a high priority in choosing a job. Increasing recycling also strengthens the economy by creating jobs in collection and reuse industries.

Government contractors should be particularly eager to participate in green initiatives: In February of 2008, the General Services Administration announced that contractors will be expected to consider environmental impact when bidding on federal contracts (Aitoro).

There are many common items that businesses should consider recycling. Older model televisions contain lead and other heavy metals, along with compounds that threaten the environment.¹ Rubber tires and tubes are traditionally difficult to dispose of, but with recycling can be remade into

¹ Exposure to lead can harm the human nervous system and cause learning problems.

entirely new products. The metals and plastics in audio equipment can be recycled, drastically reducing the volume of product that goes to a landfill. Copiers, fax machines, computers, and monitors contain a great deal of recyclable materials, including some precious metals.

Consumers and businesses are now asking questions such as: Where does this product come from? Is it made or grown locally? How many miles has it traveled? Can I recycle it or the packaging afterwards? Is it toxic (Soctt 7)? The key to improving the environment is to follow as much as possible the Three Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle. There are organizations, for example, Memphis Primary Materials in Memphis, Tennessee, that can help businesses achieve the Three Rs by putting highly trained professionals to work for you. If you use this type of organization, a Chief Environmental Officer will review your agreement to be sure all federal, state, and local regulations are followed.² Most of the services provided by organizations like these go beyond the basic requirements of the law and enable you to make an even larger positive impact on the environment.

To begin a comprehensive recycling program, arrange for an environmental expert to visit your site and determine where your company can make changes to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Then, request a proposal for collection services, including how your items will be disposed of, reused, or recycled. With a service agreement in place, organizations should schedule training and information sessions for employees on how to make use of the services and the benefits of following a comprehensive plan.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. contains five percent of the world's population but uses 25 percent of its natural resources. Businesses need to make changes to stay competitive in a more environmentally-conscious marketplace. A business can benefit by becoming part of the solution.

² For example, Tennessee imposes penalties of up to \$10,000 for providing false information, regarding the recycling of hazardous waste.

Works Cited

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