

Pallet Central

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Zero Waste Makes Good Business Sense

Synergistic to Nature's Packaging tagline *Choose the Sustainable Way*, Zero Waste takes the wood packaging industry further down the path of protecting the Earth's limited resources. In addition, Zero Waste makes good business sense for the entire supply chain.

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Zero Waste Makes Good Business

By Holly Elmore

Synergistic to Nature's Packaging tagline *Choose the Sustainable Way*, Zero Waste takes the wood packaging industry further down the path of protecting the Earth's limited resources. In addition, Zero Waste makes good business sense for the entire supply chain.

By reusing, repairing and recycling wooden pallets, companies who rely on pallet-packaged deliveries save on landfill hauling and tipping charges, and edge closer to achieving Zero Waste. For example, in 2015, Gold Level Zero Waste Facility Certified Piazza Produce "sold" 733.8 tons of wood pallets (roughly 66,700 pallets) for more than twice the cost of what they

would have paid in landfill costs for the pallets, including hauling and tipping fees.

Beyond the sustainability and economics within the wood packaging life cycle, Zero Waste addresses the materials used within the manufacturing process, distribution logistics and administrative support departments. In Zero Waste, by-product materials are treated as a valuable commodity versus trash destined for the landfill or incinerator.

A first step on the Zero Waste journey is a waste audit. An audit determines the baseline of current practices in-place as well as the quantity and type of materials generated at the facility. Understanding the local infrastructure and markets available is integral to the baseline analysis. In general, municipal government and non-profits are a good resource for recycling services and end-market destinations for materials generated.

From a national perspective, the U.S. Zero Waste Business Council (USZWBC) is a non-profit organization that educates on Zero Waste benefits for individual companies, the community and the environment. In addition, USZWBC veteran members share experiences with those embarking on the Zero Waste journey. According to USZWBC Founder & Executive Director Stephanie Barger:

"USZWBC is a solutions based organization and provides many resources for their members and the community to vet ideas and challenges. Our Advisory Board members can assist with working on solutions for individuals or an industry along with leading task forces or developing technical committees for more challenging long-term issues. Our resource library contains toolkits, case studies and other educational information."

Throughout the year, the USZWBC hosts Zero Waste 101 Workshops, Zero Waste Business Associate Scorecard Professional Training Courses and other industry-specific webinars. The Annual National Zero Waste Business Conference is an excellent educational venue for the seasoned Zero Waste veteran ready to evolve their



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and Environmental Sense

program to next dimensions as well as the novice interested in learning how to create effective systems.

Launched in March 2013 as the first Zero Waste Certification Program (ZWCP) in the nation, the USZWBC Zero Waste Facility Certification (ZWFC) establishes protocol and defines parameters for Zero Waste claims. For example, incineration is often included in the term "landfill diversion," yet is specifically NOT a Zero Waste material destination within the ZWCP. Additionally, the ZWCP quantifies materials reused, repaired and recycled, along with related cost-savings and revenue generated.

USZWBC Board Member and Piazza Produce Facility Manager Scott Lutocka often says "There's Ca\$h in Your Tra\$h!" and "You don't know what you don't know (about the value in your waste stream)!" ... and Scott understands well the cash value of Piazza Produce trash!

In 2015 alone, the Piazza Produce Zero Waste program generated \$288,034 in cost-savings. Since launching in 2005, Piazza Produce enjoyed a cumulative \$1.56 million in bottom line improvements from successful Zero Waste practices.

For Zero Waste Program success, two prime ingredients are necessary: 1> a culture shift from waste management to materials management and 2> a practical staged-in approach complete with education, clear signage, and employee engagement. Top management buy-in is critical to shifting corporate culture along with providing employee incentives and support. Quantifying, communicating and rewarding success builds strong enthusiasm and support for long-term Zero Waste program success.

Take baby steps, lots and lots of baby steps is a mantra for Zero Waste success. The waste audit identifies "easy wins" and are a perfect avenue for first stage action items. Crafting a long-term action plan, complete with detailed stages and success definitions, provides guidance and gives direction for employees to follow.

By incorporating monetary and recognition incentives into the program from the onset, employees develop program

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Holly D. Elmore, Elemental Impact

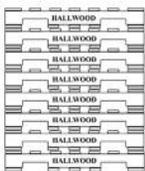


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ownership and are enthusiastic to adopt change within their daily responsibilities. Production line and warehouse employees see wasteful operation practices first hand. Via incentives, employees are encouraged to suggest alternative methods that save time, energy and resources.

In addition to industry tools provided by the USZWBC, there are many consultants who assess operations, develop a Zero Waste plan, and assist with program implementation. Consultants often charge based on a percentage of cost-savings; thus, there is minimal upfront cost for program development. Depending on circumstances, there may be equipment cost investment (such as balers and material bins) and space allocation for material sorting and storing required for program implementation.

Community and customer relationship opportunities are often integral to a Zero Waste business case.

Beyond the environmental impact, recycling material extends finite landfill life. Across the nation, many local governments are faced with limited remaining landfill life. Corporate Zero Waste programs provide a potential solution to extend local landfill life and support community public works programs. In recent years, many locales announced defined Zero Waste goals where corporate recycling is necessary for success.

For customer relations, offering product packaging reuse options saves the customer landfill costs and edges them closer to achieving Zero Waste. Additionally, proactive Zero Waste



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companies work with their suppliers to ensure minimal to no waste is delivered with products; waste is defined as by-products generated in operations and product packaging.

Zero Waste is a team sport! Platinum ZWFC at their five U.S. Plants, Earth Friendly Products (EFP) established a Supplier Code of Conduct including a sustainability questionnaire. Negative questionnaire answers require an explanation. With team spirit, EFP trains their suppliers on Zero Waste practices. EFP Vice-President of Sustainability and Education Nadereh Afsharmanesh visits vendor manufacturing plants to witness Zero Waste practices in-place and provide helpful recommendations.

The pathway to Zero Waste success is well established with the

pioneers open to sharing their lessons learned and best practices implemented. Even with the soft recycling markets, established corporate Zero Waste programs continue to produce cost-savings and improve the bottom line. End markets are solid for clean, source-separated material. In general, manufacturing plants and distribution centers generate sufficient material quantities to justify on-site source-separation versus participating in local single-stream recycling. Contamination inherent within single-stream recycling is costly for businesses, communities and the environment.

Zero Waste programs make good business when best practices are followed. With strong industry support from the USZWBC, local and national non-profits and community governments, company stewardship calls for shifting corporate culture from waste management to materials management.

Zero Waste practices synergize with an industry who *Chooses the Sustainable Way!* **PC**

Holly Elmore is Elemental Impact founder. Article was written on behalf of the U.S. Zero Waste Business Council (www.uszwbc.org).



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Wood Packaging is Recyclable

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ood is recyclable. The recycling of wood pallets and wood packaging material is being done at a very high level throughout North America.

Recycling takes place throughout the product use cycle. New pallet manufacturing is only one part of how pallets are used. The pallet usage cycle

also involves recovery and reuse of pallets that are in good condition as well as the repair and reconstruction of damaged pallets. Pallets can also be dismantled and the lumber used to remanufacture new pallets.

With the application of grinding, wood pallets and components that are at the end of their useful life end up in fiber-based products such as landscape mulch, animal bedding, soil enhancements, wood particle board or are used in bioenergy.

This model of reuse delivers wood packaging materials and pallets that make multiple trips before they reach the end of their useful life, therefore minimizing waste generation and reducing overall consumption of wood fiber.

United States

In 2011, 416 million new pallets were manufactured. In the same year, 474 million pallets were recovered out of which 326 million pallets were recycled as pallets, with the remaining 148 million recycled to become other reprocessed products.¹

Use of recovered wood in pallet manufacturing is growing at a high rate while use of new lumber for wood pallets has remained unchanged. In 1992, recovered wood use was 1.02 billion board

feet of lumber, in 2011, this number had increased to 5.25 billion board feet.

To claim that a product is recyclable there should be recycling facilities available to at least 60 percent of the consumers where the product is sold.² In the United States there is a comprehensive network of pallet recyclers serving the industrial and retail marketplace that far exceeds the 60% requirement.

Canada

In Canada there are in excess of 80 recycling companies servicing every market sector in the country. **PC**

Related Documents

The following related documents can be found at NaturesPackaging.org from the "Resources" tab ("Downloads" link).

- The Current State of Wood Reuse and Recycling in North America and Recommendations for Improvements (Dovetail Partners, May 2013)
- Pallet Re-Use and Recycling Saves High Value Material from Landfills (College of Natural Resources, Engagement Matters)
- Value-Added Wood Products Marketing Guide for Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs (USDA January 2010)
- Wood and Carbon Footprint (Woodworks 2011)
- Wood Pallets and Landfills – Status and Opportunities for Economic Recovery and Recycling (USDA Forest Service & Virginia Tech, 1998)

1. *Trends in the Use of Wood Products for Distribution Packaging Cooperative Agreement No. 11-CA11330142-13 Robert J. Bush Department of Sustainable Biomaterials Virginia Tech Blacksburg, Virginia and Philip A. Araman Research Team Leader USDA – Forest Service Southern Research Station Blacksburg, Virginia April 2014 (Revised May 2015)*
 2. *U.S. Federal Trade Commission Environmental Claims: Summary of the Green Guides*