



Pallet Recycling

A Guide for Local Governments

FACT SHEET

BACKGROUND

In 2005, North Carolina enacted House Bill 1465, which bans the disposal of wooden pallets in municipal solid waste landfills by Oct. 1, 2009. Pallets may be sent to construction and demolition landfills if they are generated as C&D waste (as defined by the N.C. Solid Waste Management Rule 15A NCAC 13B .0532). Pallets from an industry other than construction of homes and buildings would not be allowed in any landfill.

EVALUATE CURRENT SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In banning wooden pallets from landfill disposal, HB1465 placed no obligation on local governments to start wood pallet recycling programs. However, as other local governments have shown, if a yard waste or clean wood waste recycling program currently exists, it may be easy to add pallets to the mix. If space is available at an existing site, little effort may be needed to designate an area for pallet drop-off.

Local governments should first evaluate the current services they offer and the locally available infrastructure. The following questions may prove useful in determining whether to provide wooden pallet recycling services:

- Do you currently manage a yard waste facility, landfill or transfer station?
- If so, is there additional space available to designate for pallet recycling?
- What recycling or composting services are currently offered?
- Could pallets be integrated with current yard waste or other recycling operations?
- Are there private pallet or wood waste management companies active in your area?

FIND A PALLET RECYCLING MARKET

If the decision is made to offer a pallet recycling program, a critical next step is securing an end market for the materials. Pallets can be “recycled” by a number of different type markets, ranging from reuse and repair to grinding for mulch or boiler fuel. A list of pallet recyclers is available at:

<http://www.p2pays.org/dmrm/start.aspx?id=233>.

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Pallet Reuse and Repair

Recyclers may pay for pallets, take them for free or charge to take them, depending upon the amount and types available from any given generator.

Most pallet recycling companies are interested primarily in receiving immediately reusable or repairable pallets. These pallets represent the highest value for pallet recyclers and generate the best deal for suppliers (local governments). Many pallet recyclers also work to restore broken pallets to working condition to get as much value as they can from the product.

Pallet Grinding

If pallets are not suitable for reuse or repair, they can be ground for other uses such as landscape mulch, playground cushion bedding, animal bedding, compost and soil amendments or biomass fuel. Many companies that offer pallet repair services are also capable of this type of processing. Other types of recycling firms such as commercial composters, wood waste grinders and construction waste recyclers are possible outlets for discarded pallets.

SET UP A COLLECTION PROGRAM

Pallet collection programs typically require very little equipment or supplies. A separate area for pallets can be designated at most existing local government solid waste or yard waste facilities. Pallets can be stacked in a pile or put in containers for shipping, depending on the requirements of the recycling vendor. Minimal signage is typically required for such collection sites. Commercial businesses and haulers can be asked to stack the pallets, minimizing the labor required to maintain the site.

If the collected pallets are unsuitable for reuse or repair, they may be simply mixed with existing yard waste, clean wood waste or construction and demolition recycling operations. This method typically requires no change in current operation beyond advertising the new recycling service to the public.

To provide a financial incentive to recycle pallets, a reduced tip fee may be implemented for separated loads of pallets and other yard or wood waste.

PALLET RECYCLING COSTS

In most cases, the cost of establishing a pallet collection program is marginal. Potential costs may involve purchasing signs, advertising costs, containers to hold the pallets and transportation to haul the pallets to the market. Pallet recyclers may take on some of these costs, depending on the quality of the materials available.

If pallets are integrated into an established yard waste-processing program, the cost is minimal since major capital expenses have already been realized with the yard-waste processing program. The cost of adding pallets to an existing program may involve advertising costs, new signs and optional containers to hold the pallets.

If a new program is established, costs can be significant depending on the design of the program. If grinding material will be done in-house and on-site, costs will involve purchasing a grinder, land preparation, equipment operation and maintenance and labor. To avoid all but land preparation costs, contract grinding can be a cost-effective way to implement a program. DPPEA has a contract grinding fact sheet available at <http://www.p2pays.org/ref/26/25003.pdf> for those considering this option.

Regardless of the collection method, costs to manage a pallet recycling program can be offset by revenue generated from tip fees and possibly from the sale of any resulting products like mulch or compost.

INFORMATION BROKERING

If current programs and infrastructure do not allow for a pallet recycling collection program, local governments can simply provide pallet recycling information to the public.

Local governments can direct pallet generators to the North Carolina Recycling Markets Directory, searchable online at www.p2pays.org/dmrm or the <http://www.p2pays.org/dmrm/start.aspx?id=233>. In addition, a pallet management fact sheet for private generators is available at: <http://www.p2pays.org/ref/38/37880.pdf>.

LEARN FROM COLLEAGUES

North Carolina has a number of local governments that offer pallet recycling services. A few examples of these programs are described as case studies and can be found at:

<http://www.p2pays.org/BannedMaterials/WoodenPallets/CaseStudies.asp>.



The North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance provides free, non-regulatory technical assistance and education on methods to eliminate, reduce, or recycle wastes before they become pollutants or require disposal. Telephone DPPEA at (919) 715-6500 or (800) 763-0136 for assistance with issues in this fact sheet or any of your waste reduction concerns.