

5 Steps for Businesses to Reduce Pallet Waste

1

CONTACT local governments:

Some local governments (counties and municipalities) may be able to offer assistance and possibly a local drop-off location for wooden pallets. It is an important step for pallet generators to contact their county solid waste and recycling office (<http://www.p2pays.org/localgov/ncwaste.html>) to see what help or services may be available.



FIND a market:

Pallets can be recycled by a number of different type markets, ranging from reuse and repair to grinding for mulch or boiler fuel. The N.C. Recycling Markets Directory (<http://www.p2pays.org/dmrm/start.aspx?id=233>) lists pallet recyclers.

2

3

STANDARDIZE pallet size:

Some pallets are more recyclable and reusable than others and are, therefore, more valuable. Pallet generators should assess and possibly be prepared to change the kinds of pallets they receive or utilize. Pallet recycling companies are good sources of information regarding the most desirable types of pallets. Generally, the most attractive is a standard "GMA 48 x 40 pallet" – visit the Grocery Manufacturer Association Pallet Resource Center Web site (<http://www.gmabrand.com/publications/palletres.cfm>).

Standardizing pallet sizes promotes reuse and recycling. Work with vendors to supply incoming materials on pallets your company can use to ship out its final products. A change in pallet size may require modifications to racking, storage facilities or product orientation, but the savings may be well worth it. Using one standard size will reduce pallet inventory needed and labor needed for sorting different pallet sizes.



Use high-quality pallets and REPAIR in-house:

High-quality pallets are easier to repair and more likely to be repaired and reused repeatedly. The cost per trip of higher quality pallets tends to be lower than cheap pallets because high-quality pallets can withstand more trips before repair is needed.

Companies that use high-quality rebuildable pallets also can save as much as \$3 to \$4 per pallet by repairing them in-house. Dedicated pallet handlers can be trained to provide minor or major repairs to broken pallets for a fraction of the cost of buying new ones. Companies that use large quantities of pallets should analyze whether simple repair operations can be established that help avoid disposal and save the costs of buying new pallets.



4

5

WEIGH other pallet management options:

In addition to pallet reduction and recycling options discussed above, pallet generators may also consider some of the alternative management methods described below.

Third-Party Management

One kind of recycling alternative for pallet generators is use of third-party pallet management services. Third-party pallet management companies and their networks of individual pallet companies can provide an efficient way to manage used pallets and source pallets for use.

In essence, third-party management companies rent pallets to a user on a per trip basis. The management company tracks pallets throughout their usage and retrieves them for reuse or refurbishing. Third-party systems often use higher quality pallets, increasing the trips per pallet an average of 20 to 40 times compared to five times when managed by the user. This management method can optimize reuse and recycling and may save the pallet user money and time.



Pallet Exchanges

One way to handle excess pallets is through exchanges with other pallet users. These arrangements can be made by the businesses themselves or can be facilitated by local government recycling coordinators and local groups such as a chamber of commerce. Another possibility is finding a sister facility that can exchange pallets with your facility. Exchanges may reduce costs for pallet management and purchase, and may work especially well when participating businesses do not require top-quality pallets. Generators can also make use of an online waste exchange, N.C. WasteTrader (<http://www.ncwastetrader.org/home.aspx>) to help find home for their wooden pallets.