Seven Steps to Create a Waste Management Plan for Your Construction Site

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Waste management plans aren't new, but in recent years they've become more of a necessity when planning a construction job – especially since American investors are moving to a sustainability-focused investment model. From 2018-2020, the number of sustainably invested assets under management grew from $12 trillion to $17.1. This sustainability trend is affecting all industries, including construction.

We've consulted with industry experts from Recycling Certified Institute, the National Waste and Recycling Association, and The ReUse People to give you all the tips you need to write a waste management plan for your next construction job.

What Is a Waste Management Plan?

A waste management plan deals with more than just waste. At its core, a waste management plan – also known as a WMP – is a record of materials removed from a jobsite and their byproducts. It lists the site materials, how much can be diverted into recycling or reused, how much is going to a landfill, and where it's going.

There are four main reasons you need a waste management plan:

» To keep a construction site organized from top to bottom.

» To recoup losses on materials. Recycling is cheaper than using just a landfill.

» To gain LEED certification. LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a sustainability rating system for new construction or remodels. Many large corporations and municipalities are requiring LEED in all new and remodel buildings.

» To follow local regulations, which often require WMPs.

How to Make a Construction Waste Management Plan

Generally, hiring LEED consultants is a condition in the contract, but these are mostly for massive undertakings with companies that like to boast about having a "zero carbon

footprint" when making a new building. Outside of this case, creating a WMP is a DIY process, and you should be fine if you set realistic goals and implement a solid plan. Here's a quick guide to working on this yourself.

1. IDENTIFY YOUR WASTE MANAGEMENT TEAM

Begin by determining who has to be involved with the waste management planning process. Stephen Bantillo, the executive director of Recycling Certified Institute, advises that it's best to do this during the architecture phase, since the materials you'll use – and the quantities of each – will be drawn up at that time.

First, decide on your point person for the waste portion of the project. Often, a foreman or direct subordinate will draw up the waste estimates part of the plan. If there is a LEED consultant, they will play a key role in advising plan development. It's a good idea to have the point of contact for your waste removal service on the team. If a member of the ownership isn't on the team, they'll at least want the preliminary estimates as they factor into the cost.

2. ESTIMATE THE RECYCLING AND WASTE GENERATION BENCHMARKS FOR YOUR MATERIALS

According to Bantillo, many jurisdictions require waste estimates before permits can be approved. This is why the architecture phase, when materials used are also calculated, is the ideal starting point for creating the estimates. Your waste estimate should include:

- The tonnage of each material.
- How much the jobsite will recycle, reuse or send to a landfill.
- The facilities where the waste will be hauled.

Estimating waste isn't much different than estimating materials for a building. Each job is different, and the amount of waste depends on how much square footage the building was or will be, and what % of the materials will be recycled. Our guide to setting waste diversion goals can help with the initial calculations.

3. FIND APPROPRIATE FACILITIES TO UNLOAD PLANNED WASTE

Do you know the location of the nearest landfill that will let you dump? Do you have a relationship with a hauler? These are all questions that must be answered ahead of time and then verified.

Often, the project manager is tasked with answering these logistical questions, which can be different from one county to the next. So, partnering with a waste removal provider with a nationwide reach and knowledge of local disposal options can help speed up this process no matter where you're working.

You will also have to make sure that the facilities you're reaching out to can meet your project's diversion rates.

"Right now, recycling facilities are only at about 60% capacity. Also, municipalities generally set the contract requirements in their requests for proposals (RFPs). If recycling facilities can't meet the requirements, they can ask for changes in the requirements or not submit a proposal. The recycling facilities compete with each other. Some materials do not have robust markets. If a municipality were to require facilities to take less commonly recycled products, it would be at a higher cost. And some materials are not suitable for single stream and ideally are managed separately even though they can be recycled – like film plastics," says Anne Germain, Chief Operating Officer and Senior Vice President of Technical and Regulatory Affairs, National Waste and Recycling Association.

By planning ahead, you'll avoid having your project slowed down because a dumpster gets rejected at a facility – and make sure you achieve the target diversion rates. This is another area where having a national waste partner can help. The right company will help you match your diversion rates and project materials with the right disposal or recycling facilities in the area.

4. COMMUNICATE THE PLAN TO YOUR EMPLOYEES

Communicate your waste management plan to your workers so they know where to place waste materials. For example, it'll be important to explain if waste will be site-separated or mixed (i.e., commingled).

By completing the WMP early in the building process, you can write subcontracts to ensure that bins reserved for recycling and materials to be reused are not mixed into waste piles. Some contractors stipulate that a subcontractor can't receive full compensation until this objective is achieved.

To reach high diversion rates, you need to share where dumpsters are going, what materials you're recycling and your goals. Tell workers what will be reused.

"Some states (such as California) require a 75% or higher diversion rate and source separation. So, treated lumber goes in one pile, untreated another. Commercial projects often stipulate on dumpsters or reuse piles, 'clean wood only' and force subcontractors to make sure that material is in, or they don't get paid," says Ted Reiff, President and Founder, The ReUse People.

5. SUBMIT WASTE ESTIMATES TO OBTAIN PERMITS

The most important thing to keep in mind with permits and regulations is they vary from city to city and state to state. Be sure to research and speak with regulators so you know their expectations.

"Several municipalities have software capable of calculating, based on the materials of the building and the square footage, how much waste they expect you to create," Bantillo said. "If you can show you have an estimate similar to theirs, it can expedite the permits process."

In addition, LEED certification requires that waste estimates be verified by a third party chosen by the LEED consultant. They will evaluate key points including: how much the overall tonnage of the waste will be, what percentage each material will be of that total, what percentage of each material is waste vs. recycle/reusable, and where all materials will go once they leave the worksite. This will include the company hauling the waste, recycling facilities, landfills and where reuse materials are sent to be sold.

6. COLLECT WASTE DIVERSION REPORTS

During the project, every hauler you work with will submit weight tags and diversion reports from the corresponding facilities where they dumped debris. There also may be a bill of lading.

Consider working with a waste removal partner that has a waste diversion reporting process established and in place. This process ensures all weight tickets or transfer station reports are collected and consolidated into one, consistent report.

7. SUBMIT FINAL RESULTS TO YOUR CLIENT AND LOCAL REGULATORS

Several groups will need the final report. Instead of estimating the amount of each waste type, you will enter in the exact numbers given to you by the waste tags and bills of lading. Municipalities will request a copy, and it will help get any deposits back. The building owner will want a copy for their own records. Lastly, if LEED certification is involved, the LEED consultant will submit it to award points.

Frequently, a contract will stipulate where the funds from recycling/reuse will go, and often, the payment will only be sent when you submit the final report. The report should be sent once the jobsite work is completed and before deposits are refunded and contracts are paid out.

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