Recycling Best Practices
A Guide for Advancing Recycling from Aircraft Cabins

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Airports Going Green Conference
Airline Recycling

Recycling from Aircraft Cabins
Why Recycle?

700+ million enplanements
200,000+ tons of waste
$20-26 million disposal
25-35% recyclable
$18-26 million value
ACRP Report 100

Field research & surveys:

66 airports
8 airlines
flight kitchens
Airport Role

Recycling Collection Availability at Airports (per survey)
Factsheets & Guidebook

ADVANCING RECYCLING FROM AIRCRAFT CABINS
Strategies for Large & Medium Airport Hubs

Large-hub and medium-hub airports account for about 90 percent of the country’s 700 million annual passenger enplanements. These passengers generate more than 200,000 tons of waste onboard aircraft. Approximately 25 to 38 percent of this displaced waste by weight consists of valuable recyclables such as aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and paper.

Significant opportunities are available at these airports for recycling materials in-flight service. Even a region with one less recycling program, state or medical waste exist for materials such as aluminum cans and newspapers, which can generate revenues from recycling.

THE BUSINESS CASE—WHY RECYCLE?

According to industry estimates, the annual cost of disposing of aircraft waste is estimated at $20 to $28 million. Meanwhile, the market value of common recyclable materials generated from U.S. passenger flights is estimated at $13 to $12 million annually. While many airports already recycle some materials like aluminum cans, paper, cardboard, or plastic bottles, significant opportunities remain to reduce waste and increase recycling of waste from passenger terminals, airport concessions, and departures from aircraft.

A well-designed and well-managed recycling program benefits both airports and airlines through improved economies of scale, reduced disposal costs, and increased passenger convenience and satisfaction. Effective recycling can also help meet state or local recycling requirements and build a positive green image. This summary focuses on recycling displaced materials from in-flight food and beverage service, which is addressed elsewhere, such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s guide, Developing and Implementing an Airport Recycling Program.

BUILDING ON EXISTING SYSTEMS

At airports across the United States, displaced waste and recyclables from aircraft are typically directed either to:

- An airline-managed system, in which cabin service crews or terminal maintenance personnel take materials to waste or recycling containers owned or operated by the airport or its contractors.

- An airline-managed system, in which either:
  - Flight attendants bring recyclable materials to flight decks or the terminal to be recycled.
  - Cabin service crews place materials in containers owned or operated by the airline or its contractors.

At airports where recycling infrastructure is not available or easily accessible to airlines, airlines may backpack or transport recyclables to another location with the appropriate recycling services. The recycling best practices summarized here fully utilize and expand on the existing airport and airline-managed systems for handling waste and recyclables. The parent document to this summary sheet, ACRP Report 100: Recycling Best Practices—A Guidebook for Advancing Recycling from Aircraft Cabins, provides more information.

STRATEGIES FOR GETTING STARTED

Communication and teamwork form the basis for effective recycling. Airlines can work with airline station managers to understand specific airline recycling needs and develop and promote recycling procedures. Building on this partnership, smaller airports can implement the following best practices to develop effective recycling programs.

- Secure top-down and bottom-up commitment within the airport for recycling efforts. Leading airport recycling programs combine executive leadership with the active support of frontline employees. At a smaller airport, only a few staff and managers may be directly involved in the waste system, so obtaining their support and participation is key to success.

- Develop consistent recycling procedures and infrastructure. Waste haulers often offer recycling programs that include and nonprofit organizations teaching recycling programs. Work with your recycling hauler and program participants to develop clear procedures that support success. Providing clearly marked recycling containers, with all waste containers a key part of a consistent, effective recycling system throughout the airport.

- Increase the efficiency of existing systems. Right-sizing waste dumpsters and collection schedules create space for all dedicated recycling containers. Switching to compacting waste containers can be an easy way to save on disposal costs immediately.

- Track, evaluate, and share data on program performance. Tracking airline-specific recycling rates, waste quantities, and cost savings can improve and demonstrate recycling benefits.

- Make recycling part of every airline by providing education, training, and support to airport personnel, concessionaires, and others—creating participation. Smaller airports can build on partnerships with airline station managers and invited to extend airport recycling programs to support recycling. Providing ongoing education and training can improve program results, while sharing program achievements can demonstrate commitment to recycling and sustainable business practices.

OPTIONS FOR TAKING YOUR PROGRAM TO THE NEXT LEVEL

- Conduct periodic waste assessments to identify recycling opportunities.

- Separate waste disposal and recycling costs in tenant lease agreements, so that airlines and other tenants have a direct financial incentive to reduce waste and increase recycling.

- Foster collaboration and support industry-wide recycling by sharing best practices and lessons learned with other airports and regional airlines.

RESOURCES

- U.S. EPA’s Developing and Implementing an Airport Recycling Program (2006)

TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES
#1 Secure top-down and bottom-up commitment

Executive Leadership

Champions

Green Team
#2 Make purchasing choices that facilitate recycling

Service Items

Testing & Specs

Share Best Practices

Procurement & Green Purchasing
#3 Maximize recycling by separating materials in flight

Program Design Input
Consistent Procedures
Info, Training & Support
Supportive Infrastructure
Passenger Engagement
#4 Track, evaluate, and share data on performance

Baseline Waste Assessment

Service Provider Reports

Track & Share Data

Incentives

Share with Colleagues
#5 Make recycling part of everyday business

- Employee Training
- Standards & Contracts
- Recognize & Reward
- Share Results & Celebrate
Contact

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