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## Office Recycling and Composting Case Study Center for EcoTechnology Northampton, MA

**Business Profile:** The Center for EcoTechnology (CET) is an environmental non-profit that offers information and technical assistance to residents, businesses, and institutions who want to reduce their environmental impact. CET has over 75 professionals on staff and uses the same practical approach internally as they do for their customers when implementing composting or recycling programs.

**History:** For over 35 years CET has been involved in promoting responsible waste management. Since its inception, the organization has strived to align office practices with its mission for waste reduction and diversion. The Northampton office recently expanded their waste program to include a wider range of materials for diversion.

**Recycling:** CET's Northampton office uses a standard desk-side recycling set up co-locating trash and recycling bins for staff. Common areas such as the kitchen and the copy room contain larger bins for mixed containers, mixed paper, and film plastics – items such as newspaper bags, shrink wrap, and consumer bags. All of these materials are moved to outside storage containers once weekly

by a contracted cleaning service for collection by Pedal People, a bike-powered waste hauling cooperative. A small, locked wooden shed for Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs) generated from CET's energy efficiency work is located on site.

**Composting:** Collection of food waste from staff lunches, coffee grounds, and the occasional catered event for composting began in May of 2012. A receptacle for the food waste, lined with a compostable bag, is located next to the trash receptacle in the kitchen. The compost is emptied weekly during the cold season and twice weekly in warm weather, which prevents odor and fly concerns. In December of 2012, the Northampton office expanded their composting programs to include the paper towel waste generated after hand washing in the bathrooms. CET worked with the contracted cleaning service to make sure paper towels are consolidated into one compostable bag which is picked up with the food waste by Pedal People.

*“Clear, simple signage and phasing in new practices over time help to establish a successful program, while working with HR to add a training to new employee orientation sets the tone for recycling expectations in the office.”*



CET Compost is stored outside and collected by the Pedal People Cooperative, a bicycle hauling service.





Signage in the CET lunchroom helps maximize diversion

**Reuse:** The Northampton office receives regular shipments that contain large quantities of packing peanuts, bubble wrap, and other materials. CET uses the [Northeast Reuse Marketplace](#) and similar reuse websites to advertise no-cost pick-up of these materials.

**Employee Education:** Detailed signage listing accepted and unaccepted items accompanied by pictures has improved diversion and reduced contamination. New employee orientation includes a tour around the office, and recycling and composting talking points have been inserted in this walkthrough provided by HR. A recycling procedures reference document is accessible by all employees on CET's intranet. Staff are alerted to changes to the waste program by e-mail and word-of-mouth.

**Evaluation:** While exemplary waste management has always been a priority at CET, the addition of food waste and paper towels for composting has further increased the office's waste diversion. Composting incurred no new hauling costs, and current projections show a 15% reduction in trash for 2013 from composting alone. This and other new initiatives such as film plastics recycling hold promise for increasing waste diversion over time in future programs.



A book and magazine sharing station in CET's break room promotes reuse

#### Tips for replication:

1. Clear and simple signage is a very effective way to get the message out to staff about proper recycling and composting practices.
2. Phasing in new practices over time helps with successful implementation and does not overwhelm staff.
3. Working with HR to add a few minutes and an information sheet to new employee orientation sets the tone for recycling expectations in the office and provides correct information at the start of employment with almost no additional effort or time commitment.
4. Adding a handful of shredded paper (obtained from the in-office shredder) to the bottom of the compostable bag for food waste collection helps control odor and absorbs moisture.

## PLEASE COMPOST

- All Food Waste
- Meat & Bones
- Spoiled Food
- Coffee Grounds / Filters
- Napkins & Paper Towels
- Tea Bags
- Flowers & Wax Paper
- Compostable Containers & Utensils
- Pizza boxes (next to the bin)

**NO: Frozen Meal Boxes**



Clear signage increases visibility as well as simplifying recycling.

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