

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Tips to manage waste at your medical clinic

If managing waste at your medical clinic seems daunting, remember that small steps make a big difference! Here are a few simple options to consider.

Ensure adequate containers

Lack of access to recycling and/or compost containers can be one of the biggest barriers to waste diversion. It's important to ensure that your workplace has waste stations to accommodate all types of materials you accept. Waste stations should include garbage, recycling, refundable beverage containers, compost and other containers as appropriate. When determining waste station placement, consider what types of materials are generated where.

Use signage and color-coded containers

Visual cues help to ensure materials are separated correctly. Color coding your bins – green for compost, blue for recycling, black for garbage – can be effective to help people separate more easily. Signage placed directly on and above your containers is another way to help people know what goes where. Create your own signage using images of common items in your workplace. It can also be helpful to highlight challenging items. For example, paper coffee cups can be confusing; some municipalities accept these in recycling, but others don't. To address this, you could post signage with a coffee cup above the bin it should go in.



Visual cues help to ensure materials are separated correctly (photo credit: Pixabay.com)

Train your staff and provide information

Hosting a waste and recycling training session with your staff helps to ensure everyone is clear about what goes where. Check to see if your municipality, hauler, or any local organizations provide lunch-and-learn sessions for staff.

Contact your hauler and/or property manager

Sometimes it's confusing or unclear where to dispose of certain materials. Make a list of items you're not sure about and contact your hauler or speak with your property manager. Acceptable materials do vary among haulers, so it's worth asking to find out. Your hauler might also offer educational materials, visit your office to review acceptable materials with you and determine new opportunities for diversion.

Recycle paper and cardboard

Recycling paper and cardboard is an easy way to reduce waste. Here are a few tips.

Adjust your printer settings to make double-sided and black and white printing the defaults.

If a private company handles your secure documents, inquire about what happens to the paper. If it's not recycled, consider switching to a service provider who recycles it.

Check with your hauler to see if there are any special requirements for recycling shredded paper.

Separate cardboard from other packaging materials so that it can be recycled.

Compost in the kitchen

Food waste is generated at almost every place of work. Adding a compost bin to your kitchen or cafeteria is an easy and effective way to divert food waste from the landfill. Many municipalities have bylaws that require businesses to compost. Even if it's not a requirement in your area, many haulers provide compost service. Talk to your property manager about coordinating compost collection for your building. To manage odors, use a lid on the container, keep the container in an enclosed area (such as under the sink), use a certified compostable liner bag or paper bag, clean between uses and empty often. Baking soda can also reduce unpleasant odors.

Compost paper towels

Another way to compost is to collect paper towels from the bathrooms. If your municipality or hauler collects compostable materials, use a well-labelled compost container in the bathroom to collect the paper towels and keep a separate, smaller bin for garbage. Clear signage is important to ensure the compost is not mistaken for garbage.

Separate refundables

Having a separate bin for refundable beverage containers gives you an opportunity to redeem the deposit. If you can't make the trip to a bottle depot, see if there's an organization in your area that collects refundables and donates the proceeds to a charitable cause.

Assess your waiting area

Do you offer water or tissue in the waiting area? Garbage generated in the waiting area can be reduced with a few simple tweaks. If you offer water, consider using reusable cups (if you have access to a dishwasher) or recyclable cups and a recycling bin. Check with your municipality or hauler to see which types of cups are recyclable. If you offer tissues, add a small compost bin to the waiting area.

Assess exam rooms

Exam rooms are another spot to consider what waste is being generated and whether alternative options exist. For example, it might be possible to recycle or compost unsoiled paper bedding or packaging from medical supplies. Talk to your hauler or property manager to confirm what they accept.

Look for opportunities to reuse

Recycling is great, but reducing waste is even better. In the kitchen, this could mean investing in reusable dishware. In exam rooms, you could consider reusable options such as replacing disposable medical instruments with reusable ones. Consider consulting the Medical Device Reprocessing Standards to determine which instruments are acceptable for reuse and what the requirements are.

Understand the regulations for specific medical waste

Refer to CSA standard Handling of Health Care Waste Materials, Alberta Waste Control Regulations, and/or your municipality's waste bylaw to determine whether there is a distinction between different types of medical waste and what the associated handling and disposal requirements are for each type.

For more information

For resources and ideas about how to implement recycling and composting programs at your office check with your municipality or local organizations. You can also visit the [Alberta Health Services website](#) and search for "Waste Management."

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