

Addressing plastic in Bunzl Cleaning & Hygiene Supplies:



a case study

Setting a standard

Determined to reduce waste and increase recycling and reuse of plastics, Bunzl Cleaning & Hygiene Supplies (BCHS) established a minimum standard for waste management all sites have to meet and preferably exceed.

Segregating waste

Richard Lainchbury, Operations Director of BCHS and responsible for the waste management strategy, explained "Every site has to have segregated waste streams. They must separate and dispose of paper, wood, hard and soft plastics, card, molded card, glass, metal and liquids through separate streams.

"We introduced separate bins in the offices for each stream, with clear plastic sacks in the recycling bins and black in the general waste bins. This makes it easy for us and our recycler to identify different types of waste."

Another simple but effective innovation was the removal of personal waste bins under desks. "This might sound an unnecessary detail, but if we have waste bins by the desk, we tend to put everything in them, whether it's plastic, food, paper or anything else," explained Richard. "With one central waste point in the office or kitchen, bins clearly marked using pictures not words to indicate the type of waste they hold, it's easy for people to segregate waste as they throw it away. People want to do the right thing and simple solutions like this make it easy for them. It's also personal; their actions count and with this feeling of responsibility they get it right."

General waste has to go for incineration not land fill.

Using the right materials

Explaining BCHS's approach to the selection of packaging materials, Richard said: "Sites have to use biodegradable options where they exist and recycled materials where possible.

"They must re-use boxes, envelopes, padded mail bags, stationery and furniture and before they dispose of items, they have to offer them out to other sites or donate them to charities. Our chosen charity is Emmaus and we ask them to explore repairing before replacing."

Re-use, re-use, re-use

"We aim to re-use everything, particularly packaging materials" explained Richard. "Everyone is encouraged to keep and re-use padded envelopes, boxes and mail bags. Our aim is always to use the right size box but where a void filler is needed some depots are now using old shrink wrap. Brilliant and simple, it may look a bit scruffy, but it avoids using plastic bubble wrap or air pillows. We're telling our customers about our approach so they happy when they see some re-used shrink wrap."

Tackling plastics Taking responsibility

BCHS sees taking responsibility for the challenge plastics present is fundamental to delivering change. Richard continued: "Passing it along the supply chain just pushes the problem somewhere else. Recycling companies are doing a good job of taking our plastic away and turning it into something else, but this cannot be the only solution. We all have a part to play so, applying the mantra of reduce, reuse, recycle and recover, we have made our depots own the problem, holding them accountable."

Card and plastic pallet wrap

Card and plastic pallet wrap are big contributors so BCHS started here. Staff were educated, the waste segregated, and solutions put in place to remove them.

Richard explained: "Our aim is to make it much easier to segregate and recycle this waste than to drop it in general waste, so we have many more plastic and card bins than general bins.

"Strict segregation is essential, so we've educated our teams about the difference between clean clear plastic, colour or dirty. Mixing any of this up makes a big difference to the recovery of these materials. We keep our pallet wrap as clean as possible, so sites don't use sticky labels any more. It means wherever it ends up it can be recycled."



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The plastic is bailed to reduce collection frequency. "You don't need a huge machine to do this," continued Richard. "A machine in one of our depots takes up less room than a filing cabinet. It runs off standard power and the bails produced are light and can be easily lifted into the bin. Compressed like this we can bundle it and then, with fewer collections, it costs less to remove."

If collected in large enough volumes, the plastic can be sold. Transport and handling charges need to be deducted from the price per ton, so a significant amount is needed to make it profitable. "At BCHS, we partner our sites to get big enough volumes," said Richard.



Take a long hard look at 'single-use' plastic

BCHS has taken a step back and examined every time it uses plastic only once. Richard explained: "Our biggest issue is pallet wrap. We are exploring different solutions to storing and shipping goods on pallets, including secure pallets with plastic lids. These are returned and re-used at the depots. We are trialing solutions like this one as well as tote boxes and moving to cages for certain deliveries. This requires investment, but it is a capital cost that will reduce our reliance on disposable materials and in time we'll recover the investment, typically over 18 to 24 months. Cage picking delivered a productivity improvement in picking that means the return on investment was quicker than expected."

BCHS has challenged its teams to reduce reliance on single use plastics. Considering every plastic used and looking for substitutes has delivered results. "Do you really need to use cable ties? String and cord are effective," said Richard. "Don't laminate or add plastic covers to documents. Every little step has an impact."

One particularly successful initiative has been switching polyprop tape for water tape. "It is a very adhesive product and can't be torn off once applied," said Richard. "Paper-based, it goes into the card recycling stream and, with a dispenser, you can get it to the exact length. It reduces waste and saves time, and where we used two or three strips of poly tape, one of water tape does the job and can be printed on easily."

Alert to every opportunity

"Educating everyone in our teams about our approach means they are beginning to spot opportunities," said Richard. "A driver noticed stacks of flattened card at a customer. It turned out they buy card to pulp to produce magazine and book covers. Now we give them ours. We're all saving money!"

Constructive collaboration

BCHS has made a public commitment and set a minimum standard with its sites. "We are not there yet, but we are on a journey and we know we are already making an impact," explained Richard. "We are asking our suppliers, competitors and customers to do it too. Legislation is coming, but we can influence it by taking action now."



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