



Williams-Sonoma, Inc.

Solid Waste Services started the WasteSMART program to recognize local businesses that reduce and recycle waste and buy recycled products...

The Story

Founded in 1956, Williams-Sonoma, Inc. is the premier specialty retailer of home furnishings and gourmet cookware in the United States. Their brands are among the best known and most-respected in the industry. They offer high-quality, stylish products for every room in the house: from the kitchen to the living room, bedroom, home office and even the hall closet.

How They Do It

Williams Sonoma has examined every area of the store and every process to find ways to reduce their waste output.

Williams Sonoma started a program in their stockroom to label products that had been unpacked for display in the store. Once re-packed, the product gets a green sticker. If the product is needed again, it is easily identified and able to be reused. Since the item can become “shop worn” over time, they potentially only have to mark out of stock (throw away) one item instead of several due to damage by being handled and on display. The green sticker program has created a marked decrease in the amount of merchandise marked out of stock. This affects the profitability of the store and therefore increases the support of the program.

The “Gifts in Kind” (GIK) program is where

Williams-Sonoma gives away non-saleable, but still useful merchandise to 501(c)(3) charities. The company gives away several boxes filled with merchandise each month.

All food products have an expiration date and Williams Sonoma offers a discount on soon to be expiring food so that it is sold and used instead of being thrown away. They have recently created a tracking system in the stockroom to track expiration dates to allow maximum time (2 months) for the product to be sold instead of thrown away. By doing this the amount of expired food marked out of stock has decreased by 75%. If food products come in damaged but are still safe to eat (packaging ruined), they keep it and use it as a demo product.

The store’s gift wrap station has “cheat sheets” to show how much ribbon and paper is needed for each size package – the gift wrap table has measurements marked on it so their gift wrappers can quickly measure out the correct amounts with minimal waste.

The visual team uses washable sponges to clean all the tables and displays instead of paper towels and the entire staff uses cloth towels in the kitchen instead of paper.

In Austin, Williams Sonoma uses Geami for their shipping packing. This is a recycled paper

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product that creates an air buffer as well as padding for packing eliminating the need for Styrofoam® peanuts. Since Geami is paper, it is also recyclable.

As a corporation Williams-Sonoma introduced a new cash register program that generates half the amount of paper they created with their previous program.

Rather than using plastic bags the employees at Williams Sonoma keep canvas bags in the kitchen so anyone going to the store to purchase demo products may take them to eliminate the need for paper or plastic bags.

Items recycled include:

Glass

Plastic #1-7

Paperboard

Small pieces of cardboard

Catalogs

Office paper

Gift wrap

Old paper signs

Metal cans

Clothes hangers are collected and taken to the dry-cleaners for reuse

Above and Beyond

This has been a movement via word of mouth and signs posted in the “back room.” Williams Sonoma has a recycle friendly environment starting with the stockroom staff recycling all cardboard and out of date catalogs. The current challenge is that they are currently recycling more than the containers can handle in a week and have had to resort to throwing things away.

The evidence of the success of the recycling program is the amount of recyclables generated in a short period of time. Above the recycling station is a sign specifying what is able to be recycled and who to ask if there are questions. The store generates about 90+ gallons worth of recycling a week.

Recycling On Display

Recycling is not just something to be done at home anymore. Employees are asking what can be recycled at the workplace and enthusiastically supporting recycling programs at work.