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# 'Tis the Season for Holiday Retail Waste

Monday, December 9, 2013 by [Carrie Anton](#)



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The [National Retail Federation](#) reported that 141 million unique shoppers spent an estimated \$57.4 billion on Black Friday 2013 alone. Apparel and electronics topped the holiday shopping lists of customers in search of doorbusters and sales. If you work in the retail industry, no one knows better than you that along with the Christmas buying season in full swing comes increased stock. When it comes to waste management, more stock means more trash due to packaging, excess floor displays, and unsold merchandise.

### **Give the Gift a Green Makeover**

Sustainability challenges are present throughout all retail operations, but that doesn't mean environmental solutions don't exist. Making changes to minimize waste and maximize recycling efforts can easily start with small steps.

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- **Get Waste Wise:** What ends up in your retail location's trash each day? How much daily waste is generated? What percentage of the waste is being recycled? If you don't know the answers to these questions, your first task is to find out. Seek out the information yourself or develop a task force made up of employees who deal directly with the waste. The more you know about the trash, the better you can manage it.
- **Smarter Packaging:** [CalRecycle.gov](https://www.calrecycle.gov) states the largest waste factor at retail stores is packaging. To change this for your operations, make reducing and reusing a business priority. Look for opportunities to ship items to customers with the minimal amount of packing resources necessary. When such packaging is needed, source products composed of post-consumer recycled materials.
- **Send It Back:** When packaging waste is coming from a vendor, ask them to reduce unnecessary cardboard and shrink wrap when possible. For items that are necessary in the shipping process--boxes, polystyrene peanuts, and pallets--ask the supplier to take them back and reuse them. Vendors spending less money on packaging materials and you spending less money on waste management creates a win-win situation.
- **Donate:** If excess inventory and floor displays end up in the trash when the season is over, seek organizations, schools, churches, and charities who could put these items to good use. Websites such as [Craigslist](https://www.craigslist.org) and sites dedicated to "freecycling" offer

other opportunities to give items away. For example, people moving are always in need of boxes and packing materials. And green-focused crafters have turned pallets into amazing furniture, art, and garden pieces, to name a few. Post a free ad, and you just might be surprised at what people will take.

- **Educate Employees:** What your employees don't know can hurt your retail business and the environment. Waste and recycling regulations have changed over the years and continue to be updated to adapt to changing needs. If your employees aren't in the know about what to toss and what to recycle, you could be not only wasting money but also creating a liability. Provide routine training for employees, citing specific examples when possible. Communicate changes through bulletin board posters, newsletters, emails, or verbally.
- **Find a Partner:** Team up with other businesses in close proximity to yours to group waste and recyclables. Recycling one large quantity can be more cost effective than multiple smaller amounts. If your retail operation is within a mall, [CalRecycle.gov](https://www.calrecycle.gov) recommends working with mall managers who can help guide a multi-tenant waste and recycling program, which is typically more cost effective and efficient overall.
- **Customers Can Help:** Businesses aren't the only ones looking to be more sustainable; consumers are as well. Provide in-store discounts for shoppers who bring their own bags or return plastics bags previously used. For items that are shipped, educate consumers

on how best to reuse or recycle the packaging materials. For example, Target prints “10 Ways to Reuse Your Bag” right on the plastic, offering a mix of unique ways to reuse something that would otherwise be tossed. Be creative and your customers will know you care.

Holiday season or not, waste doesn't have to be a strain on your retail business. There are lots of opportunities to reduce the trash on your own, and experts are available to provide you with the direction that makes most sense for daily operations. “We work with a variety of manufacturers of high quality equipment and devices to help you manage your onsite waste challenges,” says Mark Hope, CEO of [Hazardous Waste Management](#), who also specializes in retail waste. “These include aerobic digesters, solid waste compactors, balers, and a variety of containers. Each of these devices can help create a unique solution that will help achieve your sustainability goals and objectives.”

Make the environment as merry and bright as the season is by using sustainable strategies for your retail waste.

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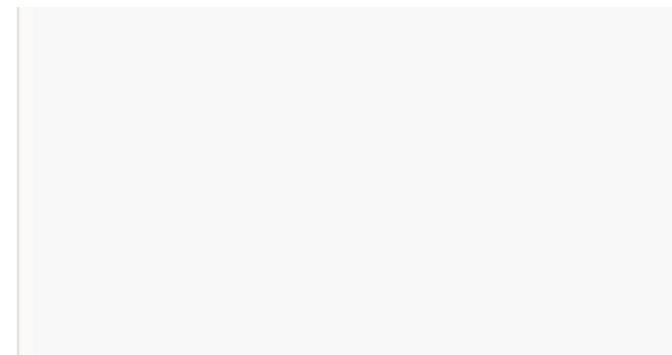
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