

MEETING SUMMARY
METRO SOLID WASTE AND RECYCLING COMMITTEE (SWAC)
Metro Regional Center, Council Chambers
Tuesday, May 18, 2010

Members / Alternates Present:

Matt Korot, Chair	Bruce Walker	Dave White
Scott Keller	Amy Pepper	John Lucini
Audrey O'Brien	Rick Winterhalter	Michelle Poyourow
Theresa Koppang		

Members / Alternates Absent:

JoAnn Herrigel
Adam Winston
Paul Ehinger, Alternate

Guests and Metro staff:

Jennifer Erickson, Metro	Wendy Fisher, Cedar Grv Cmpst	Ray Phelps, Allied Waste
Dorothy Johnson, Fred Meyer	Dan Blue, City of Gresham	Michelle Bellia, Metro
Heather Schmidt, New Seasons	Babe O'Sullivan, City of PDX	Karen Feher, Metro
Scott Lipscomb, McMEnamin's	Mike Leichner, Pride Disposal	Easton Cross, Allied Waste
Steven Ward, Double Tree	Alando Simpson, City of Roses	Greg Moore, Waste Connect.
Alison Briggs	Jeanne Roy, Earth Leadership	Gina Cubbon, Metro

I. Call to Order and Agenda Overview.....*Matt Korot*

Matt Korot opened the meeting and led introductions. The group welcomed back the City of Portland's Bruce Walker, who had been absent from the group because of a bicycle accident.

II. Food System Overview Revisited.....*Jennifer Erickson*

Jennifer Erickson picked up where she left off from the last meeting, responding to a question committee member Dave White had at that time. Concentrating on the commercial sector, she showed a schematic of the waste disposed from that sector (attached). Waste going "down the drain" in commercial garbage disposals has declined significantly because of cost, she pointed out.

Currently, 247,000 tons per year (TPY) of food and compostable paper are disposed; it's estimated that 60% of commercial food and paper waste is from grocery retail (20%) and restaurants (40%). 20,000 TPY are collected through the current composting program. On the retail side, food disposed consists largely of trimmings and prep in the produce, deli baker and meat departments; another factor is damaged products or those nearing their "best by" dates. While some is donated and some sent to reclamation centers, much is landfilled – often because of manufacturer requirements. Even bottled water with expiration dates is landfilled. Additionally, it's not current practice to compost products that are packaged.

Regarding restaurant waste, the focus is on full-service businesses, including buffets, caterers and bars. Forty percent of commercial food waste is from this sector; the majority from preparation. A recent study of Intel's cafes in Hillsboro showed that preparation waste can be halved when best practices are implemented, including accurate measuring. Similar results have been seen at some hospitals and cafeterias.

III. Food Management: Retail Grocery Sector*Dorothy Johnson, Heather Schmidt*

Ms. Erickson guest presenters representing the retail grocery sector..

Dorothy Johnson, Fred Meyer: Ms. Johnson told the group that Fred Meyer’s current practices include increased efforts to compost. The biggest challenge has been the lack of food composting facilities in Oregon, and the cost to transport waste to facilities farther away. Fifteen stores in Washington compost through Cedar Grove; six Portland stores send compostable organics to Metro Central (which then sends to Cedar Grove). Two stores in Washington County have also begun to send compost to a facility. With more capacity, other branches could be brought online within months. She suggested incentives or grants might help.

To help prevent waste, Fred Meyer stores have a good system for tracking over-stock of perishable food; if a particular store is overstocked, that item goes on sale to move it more quickly. The company also has recycling programs for spent light bulbs and other recoverable items. The company is committed to increasing sustainability, such as creating options for less packaging. One example is that bananas are normally transported in wax boxes, but Fred Meyer sends reusable boxes to the distributor for reloading.

Before food gets to its past-due date, she continued, local food banks are contacted. Fresh produce or food made onsite is not donated, but composted if appropriated. Part of the waste problem, of course, is that customers are used to beautiful, shiny, unblemished produce. Stores are driven, to a degree, to take what’s imperfect off the shelves.

Heather Schmidt, New Seasons Markets: Overall, food waste isn’t a huge issue for New Seasons, Ms. Schmidt began. Being a smaller company helps: Rather than a warehouse, they order fresh local foods that don’t need redistribution. Many of their vendors are small, local farms that are very engaged in the whole process; often the owners deliver the food themselves. Departments within each store work together, plan and run demos together, and share products. For instance, if a store is overstocked in carrots, its deli might create a salad. The meat department makes its own sausage, which reduces meat waste; New Seasons also has freshly made raw pet food, and customers can request raw bones for soup stocks. Produce is never purchased pre-chopped, they do it themselves. In addition, seasonal menus have been created to help prevent “shrink” and to satisfy customers’ seasonal cravings (not many people want potato salad in January, for example).

Each New Seasons is in contact with two organizations that are Oregon Food Bank approved for edible food. Non-edible food is donated for farm animals. Staff also gets some donations; any waste left after that is composted or disposed, which makes up the smallest portion. In 2006, one staff member decided to have a green team meeting and staff became really engaged. Around the same time, Metro provided New Seasons a grant that helped them purchase equipment: Their program wouldn’t be where it is today without that grant. The company composted 5 million lbs in 2009, including waxed cardboard, which has been very successful for them.

Regarding packaging, New Seasons has an easy, basic packaging criteria that each vendor is asked to follow. Unfortunately, they still need to develop a solid program in place for monitoring packaging or office supply purchasing. She suggested partnering with Metro to help get that all in place.

Ms. Schmidt noted that industry-wide, measures that larger stores such as Fred Meyer or Wal-Mart implement are able to influence or institute often help smaller stores in the long-run.

IV. Food Management: Restaurant / Hospitality Sector.....Steven Ward, Scott Lipscomb

Next, Ms. Erickson introduced representatives of the full-service restaurant sector (handout attached).

Steven Ward, Double Tree Hotel at the Convention Center: Because the majority of the food used at his facility is for catering, food waste is relatively minimal, Mr. Ward said. With catering, the amount and types of food are known. The Convention Center Double Tree composts between 12-14 tons per month, depending on the flow of business.

For buffets, the Double Tree wants the last person in line to see as good a selection as the first person. Excess food goes to the employee cafeteria, or to the hotels restaurants to use the ingredients the following day (chicken for chicken salad, for instance). It's sometimes cheaper to buy pre-peeled potatoes and other produce. A lot of food waste is from the customers themselves; they'll dispose into the nearest receptacle as they head out to catch the MAX, or will order a pizza and leave the leftovers in the garbage can in their room. In addition, competition drives portion size – people will go someplace that has a bigger steak, for example (whether or not they finish it). The biggest barriers to composting are simply finding bins appropriate for a hotel lobby to encourage customer use. Housekeeping staff are paid per room, so having to go very far is another barrier to proper disposal. Double Tree is looking into placing bins on the landings, nearer the rooms to help remedy this.

For “plate ups” (food served already on plates), the most waste comes from bread rolls and salad dressings. The hotel has reduced the number of rolls per table, and try to cater to customer type. For instance, older people often prefer simple potato rolls and will leave rustic breads behind.

In the hotel's restaurants, measures have been taken to reduce packaging waste; staff attend periodic trainings to help keep up with changes. Little things add up: Mr. Ward discovered that buying jam in bulk rather than individual packages has helped reduce both cost and waste; the corporate owners have noticed.

Scott Lipscomb, McMenemy's:

While most of McMenemy's facilities are involved in a food waste program, seven facilities don't participate because of space issues, and a few may have to actually cut back because the bins need to be put right on the street in their more urban locations. Four of the breweries participate, composting leftover yeast; other items are sent to animal farms.

When he first started working for McMenemy's 15 years ago, Mr. Lipscomb concentrated on packaging. For a time, they switched to all paper, but moisture problems forced them to return to lined to-go containers. Employees are encouraged to point out containers that can be reduced or eliminated. Sheridan's Fruit Market supplies much of McMenemy's produce in containers that can be reused.

Food waste from kitchen prep and portion sizes are both being addressed within the company recently. Food donation is a challenge because of sanitary issues. A meat tray that's had a piece eaten off of it can't be donated, and it's very hard to find agencies to pick up useable leftovers between when facilities close around 2 a.m. and reopen at 7 a.m. (Ms. Erickson supplied Mr. Lipscomb with two new organizations to try.)

The Crystal Ballroom now has separate bins for people to dispose / compost / recycle, and this has proven quite successful. However, it's too expensive to have monitors at every bin station all night. After a big show at the Edgefield, it's not uncommon to have 15,000 partially full drink containers. The hotel rooms, however, do have recycling bins. Most customers don't eat in their rooms at McMenemy's hotels.

Regarding to-go containers, people often ask why compostable containers aren't used in their Corvallis locations. It's because there is no place to send them from there, so even if they used them, the containers would end up in a plastic garbage bag headed to a landfill.

V. Public Comment.....All

What type of containers are used to store compostable materials?

- Mr. Ward replied that Double Tree uses about a dozen in-kitchen "Slim Jims" that are emptied three times a day. They used to have an on-site composter, but there were leakage issues. Now, they use a dumpster / bin that's picked up three times a week.
- New Seasons use 28-qt. Rubbermaid containers and Slim Jims that hold about 25-gallons, Ms. Schmidt said. The only 50-gallon bins are used for meat rendering because of sanitation issues. Some of their stores have compactors, others front-loaders; both are picked-up several times a week, depending on the time of year (insect problems in warm weather). Stores with compactors have pick-up less often, but over all they simply have less food waste.
- Mr. Ward replied that McMenamin's facilities have Slim Jims, but have had problems with the handles. They're using the 25-gallon size now and putting recycling stickers on them. He'd like to find a smaller Slim Jim for tighter kitchen spaces.

In response to a question about using garbage disposals, Double-Tree has removed their disposals and installed drain screens; both Fred Meyer and New Seasons have policies against drain disposal. Mr. Ward has met with clean water representatives and set a policy to not put fats or solids in the drain.

VI. Focus of Next Meeting

Mr. Korot told the members that additional information on the production/distribution and residential sectors will be provided prior to the next meeting, so that information can be discussed and clarified. He suggested that discussion then move towards narrowing the focus by looking at options for where the committee would like emphasis placed, and run through some criteria to help prioritize.

With no further comments from the Committee or guests, Mr. Korot adjourned the meeting at 4:21 p.m.

Prepared by:

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Metro Parks & Environmental Services

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Attachments
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