a guide to

CREATE AN ORGANICS COLLECTION PROGRAM

for your office

TN

Office of Policy and Sustiainable Practices

GETTING STARTED

An organics collection program for your office provides an opportunity for employees to reduce the amount of food waste they are generating through the collection of food scraps to be either composted onsite or processed by a third party. Prior to implementation of an office organics collection program, it is important to assign a program champion to manage the day-to-day operations and answer questions that employees may have. It is also important to develop a plan to help ensure the success of the program. The plan will need to address the following steps.

STEP 1

COORDINATION

For organics collection to be successful, it is essential to coordinate with the various staff that perform duties associated with waste management within a building/organization. Working with building managers to develop an understanding of their staff's waste management responsibilities will ensure that the collection of organic materials will operate without significantly impacting the facility's operations.

Facilities Manager

- Waste disposal
- Office space allocation
- Janitorial services
- Equipment maintenance
- Facilities maintenance

Environmental Health and Safety Manager

- Health and safety planning
- Inspect for safety issues
- Risk assessment

STEP 2

COLLECTION CONTAINERS

Containers for collecting organic materials should be adequate in size and should be covered to reduce associated odors and pests. For larger offices, a typical household trash container (13-gallon) is adequate for collecting food scraps and organic materials if it is emptied daily or every other day. Trash cans with a pedal (See Figure 1.) that opens and closes the top of the can are affordable and provide non-contact access which is more convenient for employees when disposing of their food scraps. Be sure to use trash liners that are compostable as haulers and processors will not accept your materials if they are contaminated with plastic liners.

Figure 1

STEP 3

LAYOUT

The priority for the placement of any waste collection container needs to be convenience. If containers are located where they are easily accessible to employees, they maximize the amount of waste they capture and reduce the amount of contamination. An appropriate location for collecting organic materials is typically in a break room or kitchen where most organic materials (food scraps) are generated. The collection containers should be located next to trash and recycling containers and clearly labeled. Collection containers should be emptied frequently to help reduce odors and pests associated with food waste.

Pro tip: Sometimes placing additional small 1 gallon collection containers beside coffee makers or drink stations makes a quick, easy, and mess-free way to collect tea bags, coffee grounds, and coffee filters.

STEP 4

ORGANIC MATERIALS

To avoid contamination and ensure that you are collecting quality compost material, develop a list of organic materials that can be collected. Examples of accepted items may include food scraps, napkins or paper that is contaminated with food, compostable containers, and coffee grounds. The list will be dependent upon how and where your organic material is being disposed and processed. Many organics collection service providers can provide customers with this list.

Items to avoid collecting include non-compostable food containers and cutlery as well as bones which some composters cannot process. The best way to avoid contamination by these materials is to have signs on or near collection containers that clearly define what can and cannot be collected.

STEP 5

DISPOSAL

There are several options for disposing of your organic material. Various factors need to be considered when determining which option is the most appropriate for an office environment including cost and the availability of resources such as space, equipment, and volunteer support.

Below are a list of options and their associated pros and cons.

Option 1: Vendor Pick-up

- Most expensive - weekly collection fees vary dependent upon the amount of material generated.
- Most convenient, low maintenance – vendors can collect material directly from your collection containers (most expensive), or the material can be consolidated and staged for collection in a convenient pick-up location such as a loading dock (less expensive).
- Paperwork – a contract will be required with the vendor to ensure continued collection service is provided.

Option 2: Transporting Organics for Processing

- Less expensive –some compost facilities will allow for material drop-offs for free or for a minimal cost depending upon the amount. Make sure that the organics you are collecting align with what the facility is able to accept.
- Less convenient, increased maintenance – dropping off organics at a composting facility will require coordination of volunteers to deliver the material. Develop a routine schedule to reduce any inconvenience associated with the delivery. A suitable storage space to stage the material may be required if drop-offs are scheduled less frequently.
- Paperwork – a contract may be required to accept the collected organics

Pro tip: When choosing containers to use for transportation or storage, be sure to consider the size of the vehicle(s) used for transport, and the weight of the container when full. Volunteers will need to be able to easily manuever the containers when full.

Option 3: Onsite Processing

- Least expensive – purchasing an onsite composter and tools will incur some initial upfront costs, but will eliminate any recurring fees associated with collection, transportation, and delivery. Be sure to have approval from facilities management to engage in onsite composting.
- Least convenient, most maintenance - composting onsite will require a significant level of management and maintenance. It will involve educating volunteers on how to maintain a compost pile and developing a routine schedule to ensure the materials are properly managed. For some general guidance on starting composting, visit TDEC's Division of Solid Waste Management website or read this brochure.
- Space – onsite composting requires space to process the materials you have collected. Depending upon the amount generated, an appropriate amount of outdoor space will need to be identified. The space will need to be conveniently located near your facility but will need to factor in associated odors and pests and their impact on employees. Dispersal of the final compost product will also need to be considered whether it is to be used for onsite landscaping needs or be transported offsite.

STEP 6

EVALUATION

Routine monitoring of your organics collection can help evaluate how successful a program is. Tracking the material collected on a weekly or monthly basis can show trends in the amount collected and help identify any potential contamination issues. If using a collection service, most vendors will provide weights for the materials processed and documentation verifying proper processing of the organics. If the material is being composted onsite, disposed of by employees, or the vendor does not provide weights, record the materials using a simple bathroom scale and maintain a log of all materials diverted from the landfill.

Compost Service Providers

The Compost Company
Service Area: Middle TN area
Phone Number: 615-380-1090
Website: https://www.compostcompany.com/

Compost Nashville
Service Area: Nashville
Phone Number: 615-398-0209
Website: https://compostnashville.org/

Green Heron
Service Area: Knoxville
Phone Number: 865-236-0557
Website: https://www.greenheroncompost.com/

Hoffman Composting
Service Area: Johnson City
Phone Number: 423-943-0712
Website: https://atlasorganics.net/residential-collection

Compost House
Service Area: Chattanooga, Memphis
Phone Number: (864) 278-2322
Website: https://atlasorganics.net/residential-collection

Additional Resources:

EPA Composting Resources

TDEC Composting Brochure

Get Food Smart TN