



Replace Disposables with Reusables

Switching from disposable transport packaging materials to reusable alternatives can improve corporate efficiency and environmental performance.

Many companies are pressured to make their operations as efficient as possible to stay profitable and competitive. At the same time, environmental regulations and requirements are adding pressure—especially those related to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This is of particular importance to logistics and supply chain managers. After all, producing and transporting goods is responsible for about one third of the nation's GHG emissions.

The good news is that efforts to boost efficiency and decrease environmental impacts can go hand in hand and provide mutual synergies. Case in point: transport packaging materials.

Those who have successfully switched to reusables report significant savings as well as a dramatically reduced environmental footprint, along with an overall increase in efficiency and improvements in other areas:

➤ **Cost:** Reusables last longer, lowering material costs over time and nearly eliminating costs for disposal of packaging waste right away.

➤ **Environmental performance:** Studies have shown that reusables generate 95% less waste and 29% fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and require 39% less energy than limited-use packaging.

➤ **Operational efficiency:** Reusables' standardized and durable design helps streamline production processes and makes trucking and loading dock operations more efficient.

➤ **Product protection:** Reusables are typically more resistant to chemicals and moisture, offer stronger insulation and are sturdier than limited-use packaging.

➤ **Worker safety and ergonomics:** Reusables eliminate box cutting, staples and broken pallets, and come in standardized sizes and weights, reducing worker injuries.

Each supply chain system is different and requires a case-by-case evaluation to assess if and how reusable transport packaging will benefit the organization. For example, reusables generally work best for companies whose shipping systems allow for the return of the empty transport packaging, either via a closed loop or managed open loop system.

This is where the Use Reusables campaign can provide assistance and resources. Funded in part by the U.S. EPA Climate Showcase Communities Program, the campaign is spearheaded by public agency StopWaste.Org in Oakland, Calif. Our key campaign partner is the Reusable Packaging Association (RPA), a non-profit trade association representing manufacturers, distributors and others in the reusable transport packaging industry.

The Use Reusables campaign has worked one-on-one with hundreds of organizations through hands-on training workshops, events, expert advice, grant funding, and a suite of educational materials—all at no charge to participants. Here are some cases in point:

➤ A chocolate producer replaced cardboard boxes with reusable totes, avoiding the purchase and disposal of 660 tons per year of corrugated, and preventing 800 tons per year of food waste from going to landfill, due to better product protection. Annual net savings exceed \$520,000 after a payback period of 1.1 years.

➤ A lighting systems manufacturer, in collaboration with a supplier, replaced shrink-wrap with custom-designed reusable tarps to protect lighting components during transit. The switch eliminates three tons per year of plastic film, saving over \$10,000 per year and reducing labor costs and time needed to wrap and unwrap the materials.

➤ A food distributor is in the process of replacing 5,000 wood pallets with reusable plastic pallets and eliminating shrink-wrap in favor of large reusable rubber bands. Projected waste reductions are over 120 tons per year, plus reduced labor costs from handling shrink-wrap and repairing damaged pallets.

We are now expanding the reach of the Use Reusables campaign nationally with a refined toolkit to guide interested organizations as they evaluate and implement reusable transport packaging. Key aspects covered include initial cost analysis, supply chain modeling, financing options, internal stakeholder alignment and training, outsourcing and integration of reusables into the supply chain and benchmarking.

Several in-person training workshops are planned for early 2012. For more information and to sign up for email notifications, visit www.usereusables.com. **MH&L**

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