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## Sustainability

# INIT Reduces Environmental Impact Through Zero-Waste-to-Landfill Certification

Posted on May 12, 2015 by Ann Derby

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The company's zero-waste venture began as a simple recycling mission to "green up" its corporate office in Chesapeake, Va.

INIT, a global leader in ITS technologies for public transit, recently tackled the certification process to become a zero-waste-to-landfill company. In an effort to conduct business in a more environmentally-friendly manner, the company took on the daunting task, which at the height, yielded better results than anyone had expected. The story of that journey is described below.

### The Road to Certification

INIT's zero waste venture initially began as a simple recycling mission to "green up" the corporate office

located in Chesapeake, Va. However, the greening efforts rapidly grew into a full-blown strategy that fueled a cultural mindset change for the company and its employees.

### Step 1: Stakeholder buy-in

Following discussions between management and marketing staff, the decision was made to officially commit to the project. Our management team was fully onboard and our marketing staff was willing to provide the catalyst to get the ball rolling.

The next step was employee buy-in. We were not only going to be asking them to accept and comply with new behaviors, but we wanted their input and ideas as well. When we presented the plan, the response was overwhelming and new ideas began rolling in immediately.

Some of the innovative suggestions from our employees included:

- Replacing personal trash cans with personal recycle bins. Employees can walk to a centrally located trash bin for non-recyclables.
- Installing occupancy sensors for lighting in all offices, restrooms and conference rooms.
- Installing hand dryers in restrooms to eliminate paper towel usage.

- Purchasing glass dishes and silverware to eradicate the use of paper and plastic in the kitchen
- Sorting and reusing cardboard boxes, bubble wrap and other shipping resources.
- Repurposing or reselling used electronic equipment.
- Rerouting electronics and cables to an electronics recycler that ensures 100% zero exports.
- Composting organic materials and coffee grounds for use in employees' gardens.
- Purchasing bikes for employees to use for errands, lunch runs and transportation to our U.S. manufacturing firm (one mile away)
- Offering commuting services, telecommuting and carpooling options.

Needless to say, with buy-in from management and employees, the zero-waste initiative took off. And by all indicators, excellent headway was being made.

### **Step 2: Partnering with local recycling company**

Our next step was to partner with a local recycling company. TFC Recycling is a leader in the collection, processing, and marketing of recyclable materials and management of solid waste through innovative material recovery.

TFC offered a single-stream recycling process and provided an economically-friendly solution for non-recyclable trash.

Garbage that is not recycled is sent to the Refuse Derived Fuel

Plant, a local facility that treats and burns trash for the creation of energy. This energy in turn powers the local naval shipyard.

Once the partnership was established, INIT decided to kick-off the zero waste strategy on St. Patrick's Day with a fun event. (Hey! It's all about being green, right?)

Employees were introduced to TFC representatives who explained the certification process. Management gave out branded reusable water bottles and solidified their commitment to the process. The company outlined its plans and began execution with an enthusiastic start.

### **Step 3: Trash audit**

Earning zero-waste-to-landfill certification required ongoing, vigorous education and training. The first six months were spent educating INIT employees about single-stream recycling and which food items could or could not be utilized for composting. A test was imminent; this one in the form of an audit.



INIT's management and employees not only supported the initiative, but provided suggestions, such as replacing trash cans with recycling bins.

As part of the process, a mandatory trash audit was scheduled. With rolled up sleeves and donned gloves, we proceeded to spread out a tarp and get down to business. Our TFC representative supplied the checklist while the team, including every management member, un-bagged and inspected our bags of recyclables and trash.

The audit helped reveal some areas the company would have to improve upon, and also gave us further incentive for refining our efforts.

In the months that followed, we tightened up our weak areas and extended the program to incorporate our off-site U.S. manufacturing facility and remote warehouse.



A TFC representative walked INIT's employees through the zero-waste certification process.

#### Step 4: Certification

A little over a year after beginning our zero-waste certification process, we successfully completed every task on our project checklist and realized our goal.

Every suggestion given by employees was implemented; some with modifications. For instance, light sensors were adjusted to accommodate longer periods of occupancy in offices. (Some managers displayed wild hand waving motions to activate

their office lights after the sensors were triggered.) While this was quite entertaining to coworkers, it was not an efficient use of their time.

Judging the success of our initiative meant analyzing our progress. The biggest result was the 100% reduction of trash going to the regional landfill.

In addition, by the first year, we eliminated 593 pounds of paper towel usage through the use of hand dryers in the restrooms. The impact on the environment is calculated to be the equivalent of 11 trees with an estimated decrease in the company's carbon footprint of 69%.

#### Step 5: Ongoing and future efforts

The zero-waste-to-landfill certification compelled INIT to become a business member signatory on the APTA Sustainability Commitment.

By 2017, INIT plans to build a new facility to house their manufacturing firms, warehouses, and administration and engineering workforces under one roof. To that end, discussions are scheduled for the design and build out of a sustainable building.

*Ann Derby is director of marketing and events with INIT, Innovations in Transportation.*