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Waste Management & Recycling

Waste removal and collection is worth a great deal of money. Money to those contracted with removing it, money in fines if it is disposed of incorrectly and money to your business if your contracted removals firm are charging you for services you necessarily could do without. Salus advises companies to realise the potential business benefits that can be achieved by becoming more informed about their waste and demanding more from their waste contractors.

Managers everywhere are facing squeezed budgets as organisations are focused to cut costs to ensure their survival. While goods coming into the business are heavily scrutinised, many companies fail to consider how analysing waste streams going out can not only improve operational efficiencies but also prove to be a valuable cost cutting exercise. As is often the case in times of recession, companies are under intense pressure to streamline existing processes to cut costs. However, waste management is frequently overlooked as part of this process. It is time to change this way of thinking. Organisations must realise that just because they are throwing it away, it doesn't mean that their waste should be ignored. Information gained from analysing waste streams can be utilised to improve processes and an organisations bottom line. It pays not to be blind when it comes to waste.

It sounds like an obvious point, but the key thing is to be informed about what is going out of the door – the material mix of the waste, the frequency of disposal and the volume of waste produced. For companies working with the right waste carrier, this does not have to be a laborious process, as this information can be gained by reviewing past waste transfer notes (WTNs). These documents are not only a crucial information tool for companies, but they are a legal requirement – every time waste is transferred from one party to another, it must be accompanied by a WTN. Professional waste carriers will produce WTNs for their clients, but both parties are responsible for ensuring the information contained is accurate and each must sign and keep a copy for at least two years. So, for companies working with waste carriers that do not insist on supplying WTNs every time a load is collected, now could be a good time to change supplier.

WTNs act as proof that ownership of the waste has changed hands and are an acknowledgement that the contractor is now legally responsible for ensuring that the waste is properly disposed of. Without a WTN, if the waste ends up being fly-tipped or disposed of at an unlicensed facility, the disposing organisation risks criminal prosecution, some hefty fines and seriously negative PR, so it pays to make sure things are done properly.

Licences for transit

Another important point to be aware of is that these obligations apply to anyone that removes another party's waste – not just dedicated waste carriers. So, for example, if a refurbishment contractor undertakes work at a premises and takes away waste (other than its own off-cuts and packaging materials) from that site, then it must be licensed to carry that waste and should also provide a WTN. This is the case regardless of where the waste is taken – whether it is to the contractor's own premises, a third-party site, or directly to a waste transfer station.

WTNs must also include certain information, such as the contractor's waste carrier licence number (only registered waste carriers can legally remove waste), the type and amount of waste materials that have been removed, and the date and address where the transfer took place. By reviewing this information on a regular basis (along with relevant invoices), companies can identify the various waste streams coming out of the business and the associated disposal costs, including the average disposal cost per cubic yard (or per tonne), the average collection size and also frequency of order. Armed with this information, companies can accurately compare alternative waste contractors and rate structures and also start to look at opportunities to cut costs by reviewing internal practices.

Educating staff to decrease usage or encourage re-use, using alternative suppliers, and breaking down waste to make it less bulky are all effective ways to reduce waste volumes and disposal costs. Reviewing whether it makes sense to segregate certain waste streams (for example, paper, metal and plastics) on-site for separate collection or reuse is also an option that has the potential to bring about significant cost savings, as well as improve a company's corporate social responsibility credentials, satisfying key stakeholders on two important levels.

Being informed about an organisation's waste streams does not have to end at the point at which the waste leaves the premises. Although there is no legal requirement for a WTN to provide evidence of final disposal, all companies should ask their waste contractors for this information. While it may take time and effort on the contractor's part, reconciliation should still be possible and asking the questions may throw up opportunities for companies to start dealing direct with the ultimate disposal sites, further reducing their waste costs as a result. If waste collectors are not forthcoming in providing this information or reconciliation is not possible, then companies should look to other carriers.

So, while the current economic climate brings many unwelcome challenges to companies, there has never been a better time to re-evaluate existing waste management practices. Simple steps can bring out significant cost savings, and that's something that organisations cannot afford to ignore.