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At a Glance:

- Cooley Dickinson Hospital began composting in 2009
- The program was expanded in 2011 to include customer cafeteria waste
- Diversion has increased to 60 tons of organic waste annually.

RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts is funded by MassDEP and delivered under contract by the Center for EcoTechnology

Institution Case Study: Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Northampton, MA

Summary: Cooley Dickinson embarked on their renewed waste diversion mission late in 2009 with help from RecyclingWorks experts. Cooley Dickinson began by implementing a composting program for its food preparation area (back of house) which included patient tray plate scrapings. In 2011, the program expanded to the cafeteria customers (front of house). Cooley Dickinson now diverts about 60 tons of organic waste annually. By reducing its disposal costs, the hospital has achieved a modest net cost savings through organics diversion. According to Executive Chef Gary Weiss, the composting program is now ingrained into Cooley Dickinson's culture.

Business Profile: Cooley Dickinson is a 140-bed acute care hospital that also offers extensive outpatient services in the community. Cooley Dickinson is located in Northampton, Massachusetts, and served over 80,000 community members in 2012.

Program Evaluation: RecyclingWorks staff projected that diverting wax cardboard and food waste from their kitchen, room meals, and cafeteria would be a break-even endeavor which made the hospital administration comfortable to move forward in 2009. Cooley Dickinson started with waste from the food preparation and patient tray return areas. Once that was implemented successfully, they added other sources of food waste to finally capture the customer cafeteria waste, which included their compostable plates and utensils in 2011.

Set up: Cooley Dickinson received technical assistance from RecyclingWorks to set up their composting program, negotiate with waste and organics haulers, train kitchen, dish room, and cafeteria staff, and create signage for cafeteria customers. Like many institutions, Cooley Dickinson has delicious prepared foods that never make it to their customers. Rather than composting this, Cooley Dickinson freezes the food and donates it to Rachel's Table, which distributes donated food to agencies feeding hungry families and individuals in the Springfield area.

Implementation: Since Cooley Dickinson was in a multi-year contract with their waste hauler for weekly, scheduled service, RecyclingWorks Technical Assistance helped them to switch the hauler to an on-call service arrangement and to subcontract to an organics hauler. The Cooley Dickinson-RecyclingWorks team chose a hauler who provides a 64-gallon toter system of collection and twice weekly pick-up to prevent



Prep Area Composting

odor and infestation issues, and to ease transport of organics from the kitchen to the hauler pick up area. The first attempt was not perfect as the compostable toter liners kept slipping when weighed down with food waste, and there were a few concerns about toters not being clean enough when returned. The hauler, Alternative Recycling Systems, promptly provided elastic bands to hold the liners in place. Kitchen staff also periodically rinses toters in the dish room area where there is a floor drain.



Outdoor Compost Storage Area

Cooley Dickinson staff assisted cafeteria customers with proper waste diversion through four methods:

1. Post clear signage at the waste disposal area,
2. During the first few weeks of implementation, provide staff in the waste disposal area to assist customers, especially during busy times such as lunch,
3. Reduce by half the number of trash containers available to customers so that there were the same number of composting and trash containers, and
4. Change the compostable service ware (plates and bowls) from white to brown to suggest “compostability”.

Evaluation: Cooley Dickinson is diverting about 60 tons of compostable waste annually. In a recent follow-up visit, Gary Weiss, Cooley Dickinson's Executive Chef, stated that "the composting program runs smoothly on its own." Evaluation of the program has shown a modest reduction in overall waste costs.

Tips for Replication:

- Start back-of house operations with an in-house champion. Then, gradually move toward front of the house programs as glitches are corrected and each area adapts to the sustainable culture and program.
- Be creative and flexible when dealing with large populations: rather than trying to force the process that works best for you, try changing your process and the appearance of your products to what works best for the masses.
- Use table-top displays in public spaces to highlight the initiative. Cooley Dickinson used napkin dispensers on the tables that included a space for a composting program message.