

# How to **Kickstart** your Waste Reduction Journey

By Ashley Davis, Global Sustainability Manager, Kimberly-Clark Professional™

Starting a waste reduction program or becoming a zero-waste organization may seem daunting. But it doesn't have to be. This article offers a guide for creating a successful waste reduction program and the steps you need to take to get there.





## The Waste Walk: Exploring Your Organization's Waste Landscape

One of the best ways to begin your waste reduction journey is to conduct a waste walk or a series of waste walks, depending on the size of your organization.

A well-planned waste walk can help you determine the opportunities for optimising management of waste streams and figure out what can be diverted. A waste walk, also known as a Gemba Walk in the practice of Lean and Six Sigma, means taking the time to watch how a process is done and talking with those who do the job.

At Kimberly-Clark Professional™, we conduct waste walks to help shape our understanding of what's going on within a facility and its operations. But don't view it as a simple stroll through your facility. A waste walk should be properly planned and executed at different times throughout the day. Be sure to document findings during your waste walk by taking note of what the waste streams are composed of, why the waste is being generated, how and where the waste is being collected, what form the waste is shipping out in. Last, be sure to take photos of your waste.

### Key items to observe and capture during a waste walk include:

- Behavior of personnel around waste management
- Waste and material flow throughout the site
- The location of all collection bins
- Disposal fees for waste tonnages

## Leadership and Stakeholder Alignment: Support and Collaboration

A waste walk should be properly planned and supported by all stakeholders at the site. Make sure that leadership is involved from the start regarding the scope of work and key waste contributors. Align on outcomes and set timelines for mapping out your waste reduction plan. End users should also be included since they will ultimately be involved in implementing your waste reduction plan.



## Assessing and Prioritising Solutions

Once you have collected as much detail as possible from your waste walk, you can begin to assess and prioritise the work ahead.

### Your assessment should include:

- The largest volumes of waste
- The largest valued materials
- The easiest solutions
- The most challenging solutions

Next, you need to determine solutions for your waste. Some facilities generate what we refer to as “simplistic” wastes, such as paper, cardboard, aluminum, and general waste. For these types of waste, a good initial step is to reach out to a local waste management organization to find out what solutions they can provide. See if your materials can be recycled or given a second life.

For operations that generate a multitude of complex waste streams, such as rubber, fiber, PPE, electronics, or polymers, you may need to go down a different path. First, find a waste consultant who specialises in diverting these types of materials. Have them come in and assess ways to improve segregation, collection, and material flow to redirect wastes to new applications that are more composition specific.

There are potential opportunities to receive revenue to help defray waste management fees. For example, if you are using many different polymers at your site, a consultant can help you determine if your waste has value to a resin producer who can sell used materials into injection molding. If so, you can receive revenue here. Or, if you are recycling fiber, you could get paid for those materials, as well.

For more complex streams, a waste consultant can help you evaluate all the services that are available. If you are a national or international organization, strategic partnerships like these can help you maximise the benefits by addressing waste issues at multiple sites.

And don't forget to leverage your organization's internal expertise. If you have in-house experts in waste and recycling, lean on them to help you assess the composition of your materials and your waste streams as well as specific recycling solutions. These experts can work directly with procurement to manage recycling relationships and outlets. This option is particularly valuable for manufacturing environments with waste streams that may command a higher value in the recycling market.

A rule of thumb for prioritising your waste solutions and investment opportunities:  
**the larger the volume, the larger the value.**







## Building Effective Partnerships

Waste is an inevitable aspect of facility operations. If it is not managed properly, it can impact an entire site's operations. Developing strong relationships with your facility teams and your waste and recycling partners is critical. They can help ensure support for your operations today as well as help you evolve your solutions for the future as new technologies come into the market and as waste streams evolve.

### When choosing a waste and recycling management partner, you should ensure that they:

- Provide contracts with clearly outlined expectations
- Supply financial and compliance information
- Give you access to regular diversion data

In addition, you should require approval for all waste and recycling outlets prior to any changes and specify that there will be no exporting of materials. Last, make sure your waste recycling partner provides you with a certificate of destruction.

Remember that a waste and recycling journey takes time. You can't get there all at once, nor can you do it alone. Choose partners who will assist you in your journey. This could include manufacturer-led initiatives for recycling certain consumables, such as PPE, and "middlemen" who will help provide your waste with a second life. Whatever you do, take your time, be thorough, and choose reputable partners with a proven and verifiable track record of success.

---

Ashley Davis is Global Sustainability Manager for Kimberly-Clark Professional™.

For more information on our products and services, visit [www.kimtech.com](http://www.kimtech.com)  
For more information on waste reduction in the lab, visit [mygreenlab.org](http://mygreenlab.org)



Building a global culture  
of sustainability in science.