

DRY CLEANERS



Introduction

Most **Dry Cleaners** are small businesses and should follow the advice provided for small businesses regarding normal solid waste reduction, reuse and recycling opportunities. There are however, a number of specific items that dry cleaners use/provide to their customers that become waste and are normally used only once before disposal by their customers. More progressive, environmental friendly and cost savvy dry cleaners have instituted these types of efforts and programs to be more environmental sensitive.

Resources

There are very few waste reduction, reuse and recycling resources available specifically for Dry Cleaners to assist them in establishing a comprehensive solid waste reduction, reuse and recycling program. As state above, our first suggestion is to utilize the small business recycling fact sheets.

The following organizations provide some additional advice:

National Cleaners Association (NCA)

For over 50 years, the [NCA](#) has provided education, research, and information distribution concerning garment and household fabric care. Unfortunately, this organization doesn't presently have any specific website information on solid waste reduction, reuse and recycling other than chemical reduction and management, (which of course is very important but not the focus of this guidance).

The Drycleaning & Laundry Institute International (DLI)

The [DLI](#) has been a leading international trade association for garment care professionals since

1883 and represents over ten thousand retail dry cleaning facilities in the United States alone. Some specific [recycling advice](#) is provided on DLI's website.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)

The [USEPA](#) does maintain a comprehensive set of webpages to assist Dry Cleaners. It includes information regarding the dry - cleaning industry processes and pollution issues and they administer the Design for the Environment Garment and Textile Care Partnership Program, which is committed to promoting environmentally benign alternative technologies for garment and textile care.

While there is little general solid waste reduction, reuse and recycling information, there is information available regarding some specific items and materials used by this sector that can and should be considered. See below:

Hangers

As you know, most dry cleaners provide either wire or plastic hangers along with plastic covers bags. If wire hangers are provided, some Dry Cleaners also provide paperboard covers over the wire to prevent wrinkling or staining.

It has been reported that the costs to purchase these supplies are rising along with all other commodities. While not a waste reduction strategy for the dry cleaner, one of the major cost reduction strategies that dry cleaners can institute is some form of hanger take back program. One Dry Cleaner reported a 40% savings in new hanger costs. That can be a significant cost reduction for a small business. Customers should be encouraged to bring back only undamaged hangers; and remember, this would be a waste reduction strategy for customers. Additionally, if the hangers are damaged wire hangers, they are easily recyclable and can be included in almost any metal recycling program.

According to NCA, if a wire hanger is returned to a dry cleaner in poor condition then that cleaner could send them to a scrap metal dealer or give them back to the supplier who may have other methods of recycling/disposal. The NCA also suggests that people concerned about this issue could make it a community project; organizing a wire hanger drive or identify a place where residents/neighbors can gather them up and pass along to a scrap metal dealer

Even if dry cleaning businesses don't offer a tack back program, they should encourage customers to reuse them or give them to other organizations that will, such as Goodwill and the Salvation Army. Some dry cleaners have offered specialty type hangers that are made or recyclable or compostable paper but this is not very common.

Plastic Bag Covers

Plastic bag covers are useful for preventing wrinkles and protecting pressed clothes from getting wet or stained before use. However, the amount of plastic that is eventually disposed of from this use is staggering. Hundreds of thousands of tons of this material ends up as solid waste to be disposed of in landfills or incinerators.

A number of environmentally aware dry cleaners provide take back services to collect these bags for recycling. And since the bags collected are so clean and uncontaminated they are usually a marketable commodity instead of a waste in need of disposal.

Home Delivery/Pickup

Home delivery and pickup can be cost-effective and greener for the environment as well. If a company offers this service it will obviously save the customer time and energy in dropping off and picking up their garments. Additionally, by making use of efficiently planned routes and using energy efficient vehicles, this can reduce the overall environmental foot print of the required transportation for the Dry Cleaner as well.

Case Studies

Two dry cleaner businesses were featured on the DLI website and reported the following:

Puritan Cleaners

Puritan cleaners is a 20-location, three-route company, based in Richmond, Virginia. They are able to put 80,000 hangers back into their system each month according to owner Gary Glover. Mr. Glover indicates that the store provides this program to do a good turn for the Earth (and to help defray operating costs).

A Cleaner World

A Cleaner World, based in High Point, North Carolina, has placed a penny per returned hanger into an escrow account. Over the years that money, \$50,000, has been donated to purchase trees to be planted in the area the company serves. That's over 5 million hangers. Not only does the effort help the community by saving space in landfills, it also helps keep customers. As president Chris Edwards states, "Our community relations projects bring in business. We feel it's our duty to give back to the community that supports us. We feel that we get customer goodwill by being a good corporate citizen."