



4f. How to: Manage food waste

Why is it important?

Disposing of food waste by landfill has a major environmental impact due to release of methane (a potent greenhouse gas), and is expensive. A study by the Environmental Protection Agency found that 15% landfill waste from Irish healthcare facilities is made up of food waste.

Appropriate management of food waste will return nutrients to the soil again with lower carbon emissions.

There are 3 alternative options for dental practices to consider disposing of food waste:

- **Composting:** can reduce costs in disposing of waste, and improve soil quality. Compost generated could even be sold to generate revenue.
- **Collection by waste collectors.** The food waste can be converted into energy through a process of anaerobic digestion, with the remaining digestate used as a soil conditioner.
- **Worm-farm installation** can improve the efficiency of composting on site. Worms turn organic food waste into nutrient-rich fertiliser.

What does sustainable practice look like?

Modelled example

Carl is a dental nurse at a mixed NHS/dental practice. His practice has implemented a food waste recycling strategy. This is displayed in the practice on their 'Sustainability' notice board and also on the practice's website in their '**Sustainable Practice**' area.

There are food waste recycling bins available in all areas where food is consumed: the kitchen, staff room and outside garden area. There is also a separate bin for compostable food waste (such as raw vegetable matter, teabags) in the kitchen. The bins have clear labels to explain which food can be put into the bins.

The food recycling bins area emptied into a larger food waste bin outside of the practice, ready for weekly collection by the Council recycling service.

The compostable food waste is emptied into the compost bin in the garden which is generating nutrient-rich soil for the plants and flowers in the practice's window boxes and small back garden space.



Modelled example

It is the responsibility of the cleaning staff to empty and rinse out the food recycling and food compost bins each night.

The practice is also looking into installing a worm farm in the garden to produce organic fertiliser, to reduce the costs for maintaining the garden and flower boxes to the practice.

A food bank box has been placed in the staff waiting room for any packaged food items that staff and patients do not want, or wish to donate, also to prevent waste. This is collected by the local food bank team each month.



Actions

KEY:

Implementation: Easy = 😊😊😊 Less Easy = 😊

Investment Cost: Low = £ High = £££

Financial return on Investment (ROI): Low = 🐷 High = 🐷🐷🐷

Environmental benefit: Small = 🌍 Large = 🌍🌍🌍

- Place food waste bins in the kitchen and staff room 😊😊£🐷🐷🌍
- Clearly label bins to show which foods they can take 😊😊£🐷🐷🌍
- Ensure that your waste disposal contract includes food waste recycling - if necessary switch providers 😊£🐷🐷🌍
- Consider a compost bin/worm farm if you have a garden 😊😊£🐷🐷🌍

You can calculate both the money saved and carbon saved

- **Money saved:** compare costs of waste collection fees and purchasing of goods costs each month before and after implementation

- **Carbon saved:** Carbon calculator
<http://c.environmentalpaper.org/home>



Resources

Case studies:

Irish Healthcare food waste audit:

<http://www.greenhealthcare.ie/topics/food-waste/>

More links:

Information on food waste prevention:

<http://www.greenhealthcare.ie/topics/food-waste/>