



## **The ecosystem of waste: Together we can open a portal into the circular economy - by Nadine Cino**

July 02, 2019 - Owners Developers & Managers

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It's backing up on us...waste that is. China's decision to ban plastic and e-waste imports has thrown waste and recycling markets into turmoil. "The University of Georgia has estimated that China's ban on imported recyclables will leave 111 million metric tons of trash with nowhere to go by 2030. As the treasurer of California put it, "We are in a crisis moment in the recycling movement right now." Municipalities are cancelling recycling programs and tons of recycled paper and plastics are piling up across the country.<sup>1</sup>

Plastic pollution is reaching dangerous levels. "According to a 2017 study from researchers at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 91% of the plastic we use is not recycled and instead ends up in landfills or the ocean." Food wrappers and containers, account for about 31% of all plastic pollution, followed by plastic bottle and container caps at 15.5%, plastic bags at 11.2%, and plastic straws/stirrers at 8.1%".<sup>2</sup>

To encourage reuse, NY governor Andrew Cuomo signed into law a statewide ban on single-use plastic bags scheduled to take effect in March 2020. It is estimated that NY uses 23 billion plastic bags every year with 50% of those plastic bags ending up in landfills and around the city and in waterways. Also, the NYC council recently introduced legislation to ban plastic straws by 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Companies and organizations such as universities with surplus furniture/equipment to donate report that they experience difficulty giving it away because charities are inundated with offers, and moving costs sometimes get in the way of completing the transfer of ownership. Decommissioning projects are generally large in scope and frequently, no single charity has the capacity to take all the furniture/equipment available resulting in the donation process becoming much more complex, and in some cases, requiring a fair market value audit, and/or a consultant or broker.

Specific to for-profit entities, in addition to potential tax credits, other incentives are possibilities such as earning 1 point from LEED EBOM v3 MRc8 upon successfully demonstrating compliance with its intent and requirements: "Intent: To facilitate the reduction of waste and toxins generated from the use of durable goods by building occupants and building operations that are hauled to and disposed of in landfills or incineration facilities. Requirements: Maintain a waste reduction, reuse and recycling

program that addresses durable goods that are replaced infrequently and/or may require capital program outlays to purchase. Examples include, but are not limited to, office equipment (computers, monitors, copiers, printers, scanners, fax machines), appliances (refrigerators, dishwashers, water coolers), external power adapters, televisions and other audiovisual equipment. Reuse or recycle 75% of the durable goods waste stream (by weight, volume or replacement value) during the performance period. Durable goods waste stream is defined as durable goods leaving the project building, site and organization that have fully depreciated and reached the end of their useful lives for normal business operations.”<sup>4</sup>

Other certifications that can be earned are designed by the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA). Its LEVEL certifications are aimed at measuring the environmental and social impacts of manufacturing procedures to help make responsible choices.”<sup>5</sup>

NYC businesses are facing growing pressure to address waste and thoroughly think through their disposition strategies, particularly in light of the decreasing availability of recycling.

Although waste-to-energy is an option, many durable goods don’t burn well as a result of laminates/chemicals used in their manufacture. For example: “a lot of universities who have robust sustainability policies avoid laminates because laminated wood: a) doesn’t last as long as solid wood, b) is not recyclable or reclaimable and c) doesn’t decompose well or burn.”<sup>6</sup>

Towards overcoming these challenges, we could explore circular solutions such as remanufacturing and end-of-life take-back programs. Remanufactured furniture closes the loop with resource recovery, minimizes waste-to-landfill and extends the useful life of the materials used in the manufacture of the original product sometimes as much as two or three times.<sup>7</sup> Certain suppliers in the carpet industry are taking the lead and initiating take-back programs to grow their internal remanufacturing processes and run their business in a way that is restorative to the planet.<sup>8</sup>

EPA’s WasteWise Program promotes more productive use and reuse of materials over their entire life cycles, and helps organizations and businesses apply SMM practices to prevent and reduce waste, save resources and money, and receive recognition for significant results. WasteWise partners reported preventing and diverting 8.5 million tons of waste in 2016 that would otherwise have been disposed in landfills or incinerated.<sup>9</sup>

We have the need and the tools to reshape our ecosystem of waste and transform it from one where materials end up in the dead-end of landfill to one where materials are reused and remanufactured. Together we can open a portal into the circular economy. The time to start is NOW. #makereuseahabit.

Please note: Nothing stated in this article should be construed as tax advice. It is suggested that the reader consult with a qualified tax professional.

Footnotes:

1.  
<https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/3/18/18271470/us-cities-stop-recycling-china-ban-on-recycles>
2. <https://squareup.com/townsquare/why-plastic-straws-are-being-banned>
3.  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/trevornace/2019/04/23/new-york-officially-bans-plastic-bags/#649bc5f65b77>
4. <https://www.usgbc.org/credits/existing-buildings/v2008/mrc8>
5. <http://www.levelcertified.org/resources/>
6. <https://dcifurn.com/how-wood-laminate-poisons-people-biosphere/>
7. <https://www.daviesoffice.com/sustainability/green-certifications>
8. <https://www.interface.com/US/en-US/campaign/climate-take-back/Climate-Take-Back>
9.  
[https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-11/documents/americanrecyclesday\\_booklet-12.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-11/documents/americanrecyclesday_booklet-12.pdf)

For further reading:

<https://greenstandardsltd.com/>

<https://www.officefurniturenyc.com/donations>

<https://grndonation.com/ultimate-guide-to-donating-office-furniture-part-1/>

<https://grndonation.com/renovation-partial-deconstruction-2/>

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