

Law asks firms to take stock of trash

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CRAIN'S NEW YORK BUSINESS

To sort or not to sort. That is the question New York City companies, particularly small businesses, face as the city gears up for mandatory commercial recycling this fall.

Although separating recyclable materials from their trash will pay for many larger companies and office buildings, recycling experts say it probably doesn't make sense for smaller companies and

SMALL BUSINESS

buildings with limited space and too few recyclables. But before making that decision, each company should weigh its own needs.

For some businesses, it might pay to sort out some or all of their recyclables and sell them to paper mills, scrap metal dealers or the like, just as many larger supermarkets and office buildings are doing. But others will find it easier to have their private carters

city's major supermarkets. For years, association members have been separating and recycling their corrugated cardboard, the single biggest waste product for most food stores.

The experts also advise that companies check out their storage capacity before making a recycling move. Small retail companies, in particular, may find they have too little space to keep recyclables for more than a day or two, making source separation impossible.

"The problem with small businesses is they don't have enough (recyclable materials) to interest a carter and no room to store them," says Jeff Elmer, who heads the Sanitation Department's commercial recycling effort. He urges small companies to either find recycling dropoff and buyback centers or put the burden on carters.

separate all the recyclables after collecting the garbage, another option under the city law.

Situations vary

"Each situation is different," notes Bob Frustaci, vice president of Recycle New York, a recycling spinoff of private carter Classic Sanitation Co. "What works at the Plaza hotel doesn't work at the Ritz Carlton."

Weighing the options

Smaller stores, industrial companies and other businesses that contract directly with private carters should see what recycling options their trash haulers offer. Although most carters will only sort garbage after collecting it, several, like Classic Sanitation, offer to do it at pickup time.

"We start them off slow," Mr. Frustaci says. He boasts of picking up at least 100 accounts since he launched Recycle New York in November 1989.

Smaller office tenants should check with their landlords or property managers to see what buildingwide programs are in the works. Many office towers, with the aid of consultants like Great Forest Inc. and the Council on the Environment of New York City, have launched or are launching recycling programs.

"It was well worth it," says Bill Doherty, a property manager for Cushman & Wakefield Inc., who recently started a recycling program for a midtown skyscraper. "The payback was quick."

City officials plan to introduce the commercial recycling program over the next two years. They'll start with high-grade office paper, corrugated cardboard, some construction debris and metal containers, scrap and aluminum foil by late November. Other recyclable materials—newspapers, magazines, glass containers, plastic containers and film plastic—will be phased in every six months.

Sanitation Department officials, private consultants and

other recycling experts recommend several key steps, depending on the nature of the business.

One thing companies should do, the experts say, is take stock of their trash load. They urge business owners to figure out exactly what's being generated, whether it can be cut down and how much can be separated and recycled.

"Do your own internal waste audit," says Patricia Brodhagen, director of public and consumer affairs for the New York State Food Merchants Association, which represents most of the

Mr. Elmer says most commercial landlords and building managers should know about the law by now. City officials recently staged a seminar for the Building Owners & Managers Association of Greater New York, an industry trade group.

If there's nothing afoot, the experts say, smaller companies should team up for greater volume, better service and bigger savings. Or they should push for a buildingwide program.

"Get your building to do it," advises Richard Fuller, president of Great Forest. "For an individual office, it's difficult to make it (recycling) pay."

For more information, the Sanitation Department recently produced a commercial recycling brochure that it mailed to all 190,000 companies in the five boroughs. The brochure spells out the regulations, penalties for violation, signage requirements, recycling options and other steps companies can take.

Call (212) 240-4842 and ask for a specialist on commercial recycling. ■