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CRE 'Overpaying' to Send Waste to Landfills

Survey finds 62% of what's dubbed "trash" is divertible.

By Paul Bergeron (/author/profile/Paul-Bergeron/) | November 15, 2022 at 08:07 AM

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When it comes to diverting waste from commercial real estate, cardboard is "king" and organics represent the greatest opportunity as firms focus on ESG goals, that include waste management.

A study by Great Forest Inc., a leader in sustainable waste management consulting, assessed data collected through waste audits at over 100 buildings across the US and internationally, analyzing over 170,000 pounds of waste.

It found that overall, with waste costs rising and waste reduction identified as central to a circular economy, businesses must understand the waste they are generating, Anna Dengler, senior sustainability advisor, Great Forest, and lead author of the report, said in prepared remarks.

"The numbers do not lie," Dengler said. "The study shows that 62% of what most commercial buildings discard in the trash stream is divertible.

"This means that most businesses are paying to send more materials to the landfill than they need to. Another data point of note is that organics consistently make up 1/3 of the material that most buildings discard in the trash stream, even though those organic materials can be diverted through composting and other means."

Cardboard was most consistently diverted across all sites, according to the report, with rates high across every program and every region. Only 2-9% of all cardboard found in the audits was lost to the trash stream.

About 98% of Furniture Waste is Divertible

Trevor Langdon, co-founder and CEO, Green Standards, a sustainable office decommissioning organization that operates in 25 countries, tells GlobeSt.com that one solution a company might deploy is **moving unused office furniture** (<https://www.globest.com/2022/10/19/repurposing-office-furniture-leads-to-positive-esg-outcomes/>), equipment, or fixtures to large warehouses to divert landfill.

“But this can also be harmful,” Langdon said. “As these items sit untouched for years, they slowly become less useful. A better, more sustainable, and more cost-effective solution is upcycling items immediately to give surplus furnishings a new home through donation or resale.”

Waste audits are important and must be comprehensive, Langdon said.

“The EPA estimates that 8.5M tons of furniture, fixtures, and equipment are sent to landfill each year, costing Americans \$750M in tipping fees alone,” he said.

“While this study found that 62% of trash was divertible, our experience shows that, when it comes to furniture waste, 98% can be successfully resold, donated, or recycled. Companies need to think about all the waste they produce, from coffee grounds to the no-longer-needed boardroom table.”

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Paul Bergeron

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