



# Business recycling guide

How to choose the right  
services for your company



**first mile**

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In this guide, we'll explain how to find the right waste and recycling services for your business based on your industry type and the size of your company.

From commercial offices and educational facilities to cat cafés, vintage clothing stores and everything in between; whatever your business does, this in-depth guide will help you make the best choices when it comes to business waste and recycling.



# What is business waste management?

Business waste management is the systematic collection, separation, and processing of waste materials produced in a commercial setting.

It typically involves a much broader range of materials than residential waste - including general waste, food waste, glass, confidential waste, cardboard, electricals, and more.

Every UK business is required to manage its own waste responsibly and to be able to prove this if required. So, to stay on the right side of the law, you'll need to have a waste management system in place. At the very least, this involves:



**Choose a waste collection company:** Since business waste is not collected free of charge by local councils, you'll need to find a commercial waste collection service.



**Sign your "Waste Transfer Note" (WTN):** Your waste collection company will issue you with WTNs which proves you manage waste responsibly.



**Separate waste:** Businesses are required to separate their recyclable waste from non-recyclable materials and keep them in their own recycling bins.



**Handle specialised waste according to regulations:** If a business deals with any hazardous waste, you must understand additional regulations and make sure you follow them.

This might seem straightforward - but every company will have a unique set of recycling and waste management needs. As such, it's useful to work with a waste management company that understands these needs and can tailor their services appropriately and make sure your responsibilities are covered.



# Why is business recycling important?

## Your environmental impact

Recycling means supply chains can use more recycled materials than virgin materials to make new products.

In some cases, like aluminium, making a can from recycled aluminium rather than new is 95% less carbon intensive.

## Showing your commitment to social responsibility

This might not feel like a factor that your end users are focused on, but the statistics say otherwise.

A study by business strategists Boston Consulting Group looked at the attitudes, actions and views of 10,000 UK consumers relating to sustainability and recycling in over 100 brands across 13 different sectors.

The study discovered that friends and family are considered the most trusted source of a brand's sustainability perception. Put simply, your customers talk - and, as unlikely as it might sound, your commitment to recycling and creating a more sustainable business is likely to be one of their talking points.

Despite this interest, less than half of interested consumers actually feel well-informed about the commitments businesses make in terms of recycling and sustainability. So, the message is clear - having a business recycling plan is important and being transparent about it is important too.

**76%** of consumers expect brands to play their part in sustainability

**57%** of consumers say their perception of a brand is influenced by its sustainability practices

# Do I need to report on my business waste & recycling?

The requirements differ depending on the size of your business.

Small businesses don't currently have any mandatory reporting requirements, but your waste collector should be able to provide you with data on how much and how well you're recycling.

Larger businesses are increasingly being mandated to complete greenhouse gas reporting.

Scope emissions are part of the UK government's Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting (SECR) guidelines and are broken down into 3 categories: Scope 1, 2 and 3.

Scope 3 emissions are the ones that are associated with your value chain, i.e. the suppliers you buy from, how your products are used, and how the company you've chosen to handle your business waste performs from an environmental point of view.

Getting this part of Scope 3 right for your company means choosing a business waste service that understands Scope 3 and focuses on reducing your carbon impact.



# Core recycling services for all businesses

We consider the following to be the “core” services that all companies need:



General waste



Mixed recycling



Food recycling

While you'd be right to assume that a restaurant and a bank will have different recycling needs, you might be surprised to find out how much these - and all businesses - have in common when it comes to waste.

Rather than explore these services in detail for each industry, we've covered them in the next few pages - including some information on how to tailor these services to your exact needs.



## General waste

General waste refers to any non-recyclable waste materials that businesses generate. Put simply; this is any waste that isn't suitable for your recycling bins.

Some examples of general waste might include tissues, napkins, used or contaminated disposable gloves, bagged vacuum cleaner dust, hygiene products, and plastics or packaging that can't be recycled.

This is the type of waste that most people assume is sent to a landfill - but the most green-focused waste management partners will make sure this doesn't happen. For example, at First Mile, we have a zero-to-landfill promise - with general waste instead being used to generate green energy. This approach isn't just good for the environment, but also good for your Scope 3 reporting.



## Mixed recycling

A dry mixed recycling service is one that collects a variety of recyclable materials that are all placed into the same bin. Although this recycling requires further sorting when it's processed, it's a fantastic way of streamlining recycling within your business - which in turn promotes higher recycling rates.

Some examples of items that are suitable for mixed recycling are plastic bottles, aluminium cans, paper, empty aerosol cans, plastic pots, and food and drink cartons.

Depending on the amount of mixed recycling your business creates, you can set up either smaller sack or larger bin collections on days that are right for you. You'll be given scheduled times to leave your sacks or bins outside your premises - or choose times that work for you - and your supplier will pick them up as required.



## Food recycling

Leftover food is usually significantly heavier than the other items that go in a general waste bin. Since general waste costs are based on weight, even a modest food recycling collection will help to bring those costs down.

A good waste partner will help you understand how much food waste you produce and tailor collections according to your need - no matter how large or small.

Impressively, adding food recycling to the services you use will typically reduce general waste costs by a third. This makes food recycling an important core service for almost all businesses.



# Hospitality

The hospitality industry is largely made up of businesses like hotels, bed and breakfasts, and meeting venues.

The kind of waste generated in these environments can be diverse, encompassing food waste from on-site catering, packaging from supplies, paper waste, glass bottles, plastics, and in certain cases, more unique waste such as e-waste from outdated technology or furniture from renovations.

Whether you opt for smaller kerbside sack collections or larger bins with a planned schedule, most hospitality businesses are open late into the evening - so they find that a PM collection time is the best fit for their needs.



## Hospitality waste: Hot topics

Hospitality businesses see a lot of customers come and go. As such, single-use disposable items are commonly used, creating a lot of waste. Single-use plastics can go into mixed recycling, but it's cheaper to set up a specific stream for them.

Flexible plastics, like bubble wrap, are often used to package these single-use items, which will also need a specialist recycling stream.

Hotels also tend to have specialist needs when it comes to mattresses and bed linen. Again, a good waste partner will help you understand what can be done in terms of collection and recycling of these items.

## Which recycling services do hospitality businesses require?

Along with the core services we've outlined above, hospitality businesses will often have specialist requirements in the following areas:



Cardboard



Coffee grounds



Coffee cups



Textiles



Single-use plastics



Flexible plastics



Clothes



Mattresses



Fluorescent tubes



Plastic kegs



Glass



Cooking oil



## Waste requirements depending on hospitality business size

Small businesses generally deal with manageable waste volumes. At this level, creating best practices around core recycling services is an important factor in streamlining staff and guest processes and achieving your recycling goals.

Where specialist recycling streams are needed for smaller hospitality businesses, they can often be set up on an ad-hoc basis by your waste partner.

Medium-sized hospitality businesses will see more waste as their guest numbers grow. At this level, you may consider some in-house equipment, such as balers and compactors, to manage the storage of recyclable materials between collections.

You may also find that you're dealing with a more predictable flow of specialist waste, so your waste management company might suggest scheduled collections of specialist recycling streams.

For large hospitality businesses, the volume of waste created by staff and guests is likely to be significantly increased - even if the waste streams are similar. This will usually mean working very closely with a recycling partner to establish best practices across the business - along with ongoing auditing and refinement of your processes.



## Food & beverage

The food & beverage sector is a substantial one - with over 150,000 enterprises across the UK. From cafes and restaurants to bars and nightclubs, the industry has a unique set of waste management needs.

Because of such strict regulation from different agencies, food & beverage companies of all sizes often look to specialist waste management companies for guidance and support. It's essential that businesses handle their waste according to both Environment Agency laws and the standards laid out by the Food Standards Agency and equivalent bodies around the UK.

Typically, evening or late-night collections are required for food & beverage businesses - working around late opening hours and often central locations.

## Food & beverage waste: Hot topics

If you work in the food and beverage sector, you'll be acutely aware of the volume of food waste businesses can create. While this is largely unavoidable, it doesn't mean waste has to end up in landfill. A good waste partner will help you identify food redistribution schemes as well as environmentally effective food waste recycling services.

Food and beverage businesses also deal with a lot of disposable packaging. In some cases, this waste is compostable, which means it will require its own waste streams. The same can be said of cooking oil too - no one wants to think about fatbergs, let alone contribute to them - so oil and grease should have a dedicated recycling service.

For many food and beverage businesses, plastic kegs are used to bring quantities of drinks into your premises. Perhaps obviously, these are designed for reuse - but unless you have collections that match consumption, they can be problematic to store.

Your waste partner will help you create processes around these areas and make sure you have the correct business recycling bins and processes in place for your team to handle all these materials appropriately.

## Which services do food & beverage businesses require?

Along with the core services we've outlined above, food & beverage businesses will often have specialist requirements in the following areas:



Plastic kegs



Coffee grounds



Coffee cups



Glass



Single-use plastics



Flexible plastics



Cartons



Bottle corks



Cooking oil



Cardboard



Compostables





## Waste requirements depending on food & beverage business size

Smaller businesses like independent cafes or small restaurants will typically have a smaller volume of waste. At this level, separating waste at source is essential - with separate business bins for core streams like cardboard packaging, general waste, and mixed recycling.

Even smaller food & beverage businesses should look at more specialist waste, like cooking oil or compostable packaging. A business waste partner will help you understand what's possible and the frequency of the collections you'll need in each area.

As the size of your business or number of locations increases, it's important to have consistent best practices that can be easily understood and implemented by a larger team of people. A waste partner will help you to create and implement these practices, along with increasing collection frequency in line with the volume of waste you create.

Large food & beverage businesses could also benefit from regular waste audits to understand their waste streams better and optimise their waste management strategies.





## Retail

The scope of businesses within the retail sector is huge – spanning everything from independent boutique shops and convenience stores all the way through large electronics stores, supermarkets and department stores.

This variation in the type of outlet also means a huge variation in the waste that's produced. Retail businesses use virtually every service we offer – so your specifics are going to depend on your unique needs. That said, typical retail waste often includes packing materials (like cardboard, plastic, and sometimes wood from pallets), unsold items, damaged goods, clothes hangers, and food waste (in the case of grocery stores).

Increased customer awareness of retail-industry sustainability also means more and more companies are looking to provide return and recycling points too. Despite this, few businesses have the resources in-house to handle the behind-the-scenes work needed to make this kind of scheme work, so will look to a waste management service provider to facilitate this.

## Retail waste: Hot topics

Retail businesses typically handle a lot of deliveries - and deliveries almost always mean large amounts of packaging.

If you sell clothing, this also means dealing with a lot of polyethene bags and clothes hangers on top of cardboard and paper waste. Plus with the rise of fast fashion, many returned items often find their way to landfill if a waste partner doesn't have the means to recycle or redistribute items that can't be sold.

Different retail outlets also have different busy periods too - which can mean big deliveries at different points throughout the month or year. Since the size and frequency of these will vary depending on what you sell, it's useful to have a waste management team that can offer ad-hoc clearances to deal with a sudden influx of packaging.

## Which services do retail businesses require?

As well as the core services we've outlined above, retail businesses will also typically require:



Cardboard



Hangers



Clothes



Flexible  
plastics



Ad hoc  
clearances



## Waste requirements depending on retail business size

For smaller retail businesses - such as independent one-location stores - it's essential to get core recycling services established and then supplement these with any specific needs your store has. Smaller businesses usually have smaller teams, so a waste partner will be able to help you understand what's needed to create best practices and quickly get your staff onside.

Waste starts to be a bigger challenge for medium-sized retail businesses where deliveries and staff teams are larger. Again though, working with a waste management partner will help you to anticipate busy periods and build a collection schedule that's tailored to your specific needs - along with putting together training that helps your larger staff team to understand and handle waste effectively.

For large-scale retail businesses, effective training of staff and management of waste becomes even more essential. A recycling partner will be able to work with you to perform recycling audits - looking at the types of waste you create and advising on the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial ways to handle the huge volumes of packaging and returned goods that you'll be facing.

A good waste management partner will also help larger businesses to identify sustainability initiatives, like zero-waste policies or circular economy practices, in an effort to boost your company's sustainability profile.





## Public venues

Public venues are quite unlike any other business - not least because of the often-changing frequency and size of events that are held. From small business meeting rooms and intimate wedding venues to stadiums, cinemas and theatres, the kind of upkeep and waste management needs will vary greatly.

Of course, it's not only the size of the venue that will dictate your waste requirements - different events will create vastly different types of waste - and guests who might have different attitudes towards how carefully they select the bin to put their waste in.

Whether you're a small venue dealing with one-use cups and confetti or a festival organiser who doesn't have any use for thousands of abandoned tents or single wellies, the right recycling partner will make sure nothing stands in the way of your venue being ready for its next event.

## Public venue waste: Hot topics

In public venues, single-use plastics are often an essential part of creating profitable performances or events. With these single-use plastics comes a need for a robust infrastructure surrounding their recycling - especially when there are high volumes of people visiting in short timeframes.

Public venues often have late-night opening times and central locations - similar to hospitality or food and beverage businesses. Both these factors usually mean specific collection times are required or late-night ad-hoc clearances after larger events.

## Which services do public venue businesses require?

As well as the core services we've outlined above, public venue businesses will also typically require:



Cardboard



Hangers



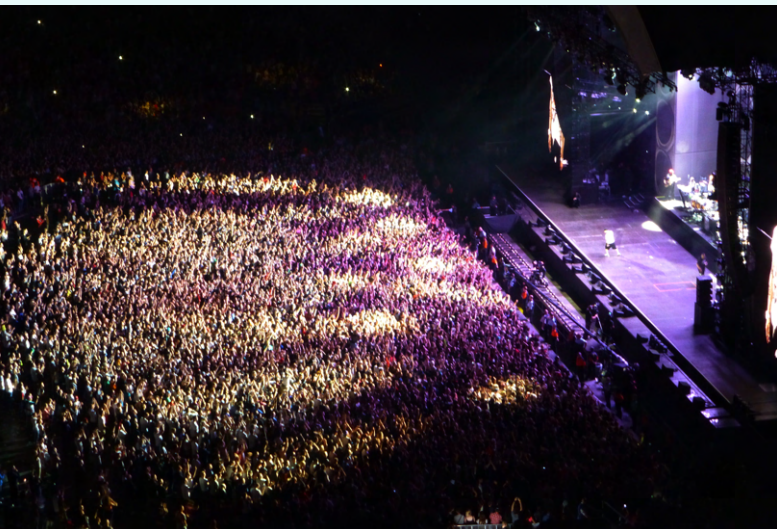
Clothes



Flexible  
plastics



Ad hoc  
clearances



## Waste requirements depending on venue size

Small public venues - such as community centres or local theatres - will often have a minimal waste management requirement. At this level, working with a waste and recycling partner who can provide the correct bins and advise on collection schedules is sometimes all that's required.

Some team training around the correct use of different bins is also useful - along with input from your recycling partner about how any specialist waste products should be handled.

The same kind of team and guest education is also needed for medium-size public venues - although the volume of waste created is often much larger. Lots of food and drink is often required for larger events, so targeted strategies for efficient recycling of these materials can really help to maximise your efforts and resources in these instances.

Large public venues - such as stadiums or concert arenas - will often be faced with a substantial volume and variety of waste. If you're operating at this level, working closely with a recycling partner is essential, and it can be especially helpful if you can share your event schedule and plan ahead with your waste partner.

Whether you're dealing with sporting events, music concerts or large-scale expo shows, you'll almost certainly need large-scale recycling programs for food and drink packaging, paper waste, and general waste. If you've got on-site catering facilities, you may require additional support in this area too - whether that's plastic keg removal, cooking oil recycling, or the large-scale recycling of single-use drinks containers.





# Offices

While businesses operating in offices can vary from small disruptive startups through to large corporate HQs, the types of waste created tend to be along the same lines. Perhaps unsurprisingly, paper and cardboard feature highly - although waste needs can become significantly more diverse if you operate any catering facilities on-site.

Since waste bins and recycling bins are often a service that a facilities team will provide to office-based staff, it can be useful to work with a waste management company to create a strategy that ensures buy-in from staff. As much as recycling is an important factor - staff members are rarely willing to scale three flights of stairs to properly dispose of their apple core or vending machine coffee cup.

## Office waste: Hot topics

In recent years, data has become an increasingly valuable asset for office-based businesses - so it's probably no surprise that the secure disposal of confidential information is top of many businesses' priority lists.

We've touched on it already in our core services - but it's absolutely essential that office-based companies work with a waste management company that can guarantee compliance with data protection legislation.

## Which services do offices require?

As well as the core services we've outlined above, offices will also typically require:





## Waste requirements depending on office size

Even if you have a manageable volume of waste, many small businesses benefit from having waste management efforts that can grow as their business expands. This will usually start with a range of recycling bins and an effort to use recycled materials, but may also include composting waste if you have a kitchen area.

Talking to a waste management partner early is often a smart move. They'll be able to get you started with the fundamentals and help you expand as your company grows - a process that's infinitely easier than suddenly finding yourself working across three floors or multiple locations with no waste or recycling plan in place.

Of course, medium and large office-based businesses also need a comprehensive plan that includes the core recycling streams - but will often have to expand their streams to include the various waste streams created by on-site catering. Catering comes with its own set of rules and regulations around the handling of food waste too - so larger offices with kitchen and canteen spaces will benefit from the input of a specialist waste partner.

At this level, waste management is likely to be part - or all - of a person's role within a facilities management team. This person or department will usually work closely with a waste management company to make sure all waste streams are accounted for and audited or monitored on an ongoing basis.

E-waste also becomes a factor when you have hundreds - or even thousands - of workers using digital devices under one roof or across different office locations. Electronics require specialist disposal or recycling and, unfortunately for your company's CapEx budget, they break down and require replacement more frequently than many people imagine.





## Educational institutions

When it comes to a diverse range of settings, there are few industries that come close to educational institutions. From primary school canteens through to university engineering workshops and science laboratories, educational settings really can tick every box when it comes to waste.

Of course, educational institutions also vary in size significantly, so the needs of a 30-child nursery will be different from the requirements of a 20,000-student university complex.

That said, regardless of size, the waste policies implemented in an educational facility must align with local or national government targets for recycling and waste reductions. So, whether you're dealing with tearaway toddlers or aspiring PhD students, it's useful to have a waste-management company onside when it comes to putting together a business recycling plan.

## Educational institution waste: Hot topics

If you work in an educational setting, you're probably programmed to work around terms rather than the weeks or months of other businesses. When a term ends, small schools and nurseries almost certainly need a waste partner that can provide ad-hoc clearance services as displays come down and classrooms are reset.

There are also peak times to consider for colleges and universities. As the pressure of assignment deadlines increases, so too does the pressure on waste streams. A good recycling partner will help you deal with increased paper and toner recycling, as well the inevitable influx of coffee cups and energy drink cans.

## Which services do educational institutions require?

As well as the core services we've outlined above, educational institutions will also typically require:





## Waste requirements depending on educational institution size

Smaller education settings typically generate a manageable volume of waste. Having recycling bins in each classroom is a great first step for sorting waste at its source. Typically, cleaning or maintenance teams will then make sure these classroom bins are transferred to larger bins outside the teaching space, which can then be collected by your waste partner on a scheduled basis.

Older students in larger facilities tend to have a greater understanding of recycling, so can often use different bins to begin waste sorting early in the process. This recycling bin infrastructure can be used more widely too, including in canteens, kitchens, and staff or admin offices. A good waste management partner will help you to create this infrastructure and will often be able to provide accessible signage to help with its use.

Large educational institutions, such as colleges and universities, often tower above even large businesses in terms of staff and student numbers. So, waste management needs are usually extremely large and diverse.

Large educational institutions often have specialist departments with equally specialist waste requirements. Science or medical labs may create chemical or biological waste. Engineering departments could also be working with specialist materials. Many of the waste products from these and other facilities could require specialist handling in line with Environment Agency guidelines. Of course, this is all before considering student accommodation kitchens.

Many higher education establishments also want to make sure they're at the forefront of sustainability practices - another important reason to work with a waste management partner who understands this drive.





## Beauty salons

Beauty, hairdressing, and other wellness businesses offer a wide and diverse range of services - with an equally diverse range of waste materials.

This waste can include packaging from beauty products, disposable items like paper towels or waxing strips, hair clippings, and occasionally, in the case of treatments like micro-needling, Botox, and other minimally invasive procedures, hazardous waste like chemicals or sharps.

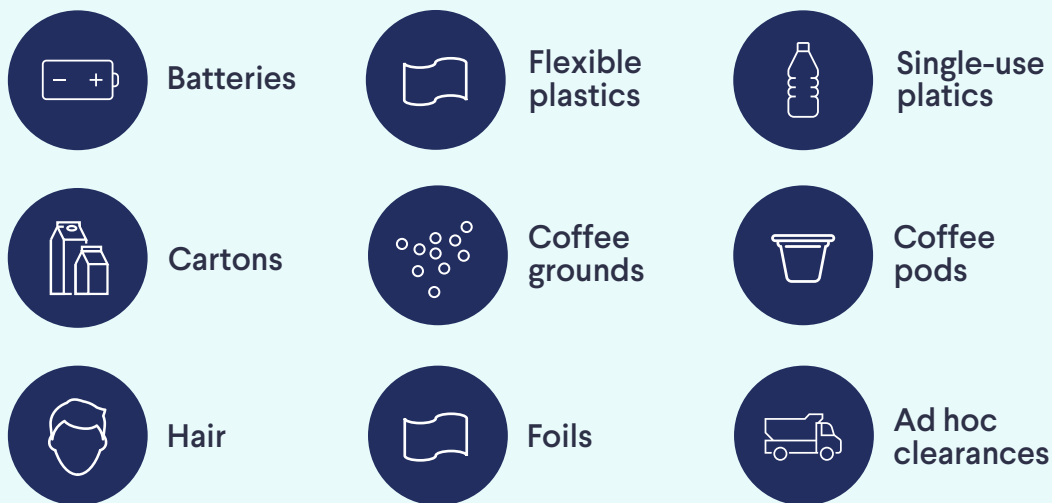
## Beauty salon waste: Hot topics

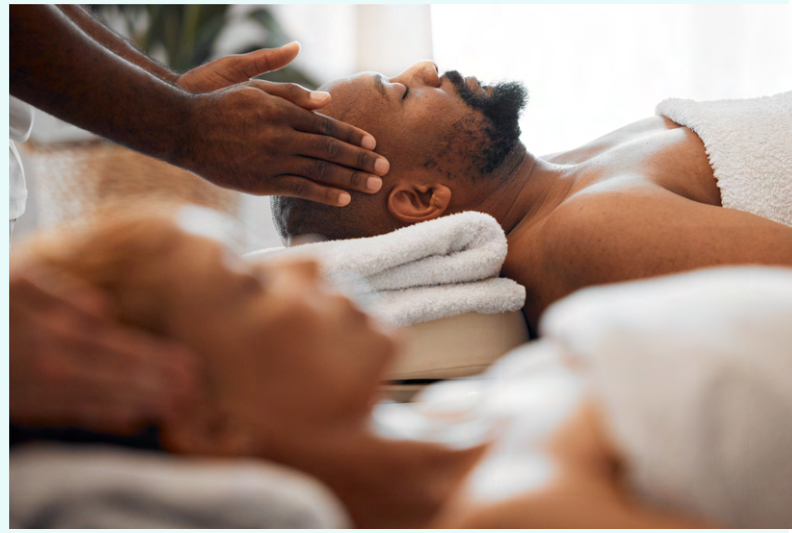
Of all the waste streams mentioned in this guide, salons create some of the most unique waste thanks to the hair they cut and the foils they use for colouring. These require specialist recycling, and a good waste partner should have partnerships set up with specialist providers who offer this.

Beauty and salon-based businesses also have a unique opportunity to help the environment that most businesses in this guide don't. If your business creates hair waste, it can be collected together as 'booms' by specialist companies, which are then used to soak up coastal oil spills.

## Which services do beauty salons require?

As well as the core services we've outlined above, beauty salons will also typically require:





## Waste requirements depending on beauty salon size

Although most businesses require additional waste management services as they grow in size, a larger salon doesn't always offer a great range of services. In many cases, smaller businesses offer a more specialist range of treatments and can therefore require a more specialist set of waste management services.

For single-location small beauty or salon businesses, focusing on separation of waste and the safe handling of specialist streams is essential. A business waste partner will help to put together an infrastructure that helps your team to identify and sort a huge variety of materials. Many hair clippings, foils, colour tubes, wax sticks, cotton pads, and other salon waste is suitable for recycling or composting - while most people tend to assume that these are general waste items. Creating specialist streams for these items will help to significantly reduce general waste costs.

Larger businesses in the beauty, hairdressing, and wellness space will almost certainly see a far greater customer footfall, with clients often opting for multiple treatments or full/half-day packages that could involve a series of experiences and services. At this level, you may find that some level of food and beverage waste requirement is also needed when clients are on-site for longer periods.

With numerous team members and a more complex management structure, a specialist waste partner can help you to implement waste audits and ongoing monitoring to reduce waste and improve recycling/reuse across the business.



## Medical & vets

While there's a wide and varied range of businesses on this list, it's fair to say that medical and veterinary businesses tend to have the most specialist requirements owing to the nature of the services offered and the waste created by those services.

As you're likely already aware, there is no shortage of laws and regulations in place to ensure that clinical waste is handled appropriately, not least the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Hazardous Waste Regulations 2005, and Controlled Waste Regulations 2012. It's absolutely essential that you work with a waste management provider that can offer a service that meets these strict requirements.



## Medical & vet waste: Hot topics

Although highly specialist waste management will often be the first thing people think of when they think about clinical facilities, medical providers often have to be especially mindful of resource management - so it's essential to have streamlined core services around cardboard, paper, and general waste.

Of course, confidentiality around medical services also has to be second to none, so regular collection and secure disposal of confidential paperwork and data should be at the very centre of any waste and recycling partnership.

## Which services do medical & vets require?

As well as the core services we've outlined above, medical facilities & vets will also typically require:



WEEE



Flexible  
plastics



Single-use  
plastics



Clinical  
sharps



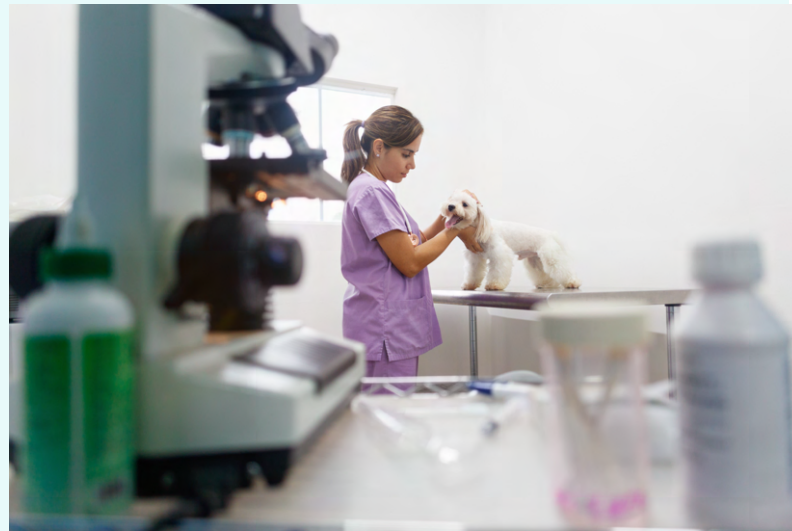
Paper



Ink & toner  
cartridge recycling



Biohazardous  
waste bins



## Waste requirements depending on medical business size

Although a medical or veterinary business may be small, the nature of the work that is carried out requires careful waste management procedures regardless of business size. So, although many small businesses will be able to find their way through standard waste regulations, it's important that medical facilities work closely with a waste management company to fully understand the highly specialist nature of the waste created in clinical settings.

On a larger scale, a medical or veterinary practice will house more team members and see more patients. As well as the volume of waste increasing, this also means more people will be involved with waste management - which means a greater need for staff training around waste streams and their various processes.

Waste management in large medical or veterinary institutions is a large and complex task that spans every part of the business - from the clinical waste created by the services offered through to the food and oil waste created in canteen and cafeteria spaces.

At the heart of the waste management plan for such a large facility will be comprehensive medical waste disposal - collection and proper disposal of biohazardous, infectious, radioactive, pharmaceutical, sharp, and pathological waste. Working with a specialist provider who deals with this kind of waste is essential - as is compliance with all relevant regulations that apply to this kind of waste.



# 3 questions to help get you started

If you're looking at this guide after creating a new business or having recently taken over a role that involves some responsibility for waste management, it would be easy to feel a little overwhelmed. You might be wondering where to start, how to get a handle on Scope 3 emissions, or possibly even how you can take your recycling efforts to the next level. Try these three questions to think about or discuss with your team:

## 1. Where are we currently in terms of our business waste management?

Do you understand the types and volumes of waste you create right now and how you handle this waste? If not, consider working with a waste management company to undertake a waste audit, to help identify which streams your business needs.

## 2. What are the top three waste streams that your business can start recycling immediately?

Whether that's the basics for a new business or additional streams you could create for your established company.

## 3. How can you engage your staff and customers in your recycling efforts?

Business recycling isn't a one-person job at any scale. Think about how you can engage employees and customers to make your efforts stick.

The good news is, First Mile can help you answer these questions and help you make the right decisions for your business. Providing a waste audit is just one way we can help.

Government initiatives around recycling generally mean that the greener you are, the less your waste is going to cost. We can help you avoid carbon emissions and handle waste as responsibly as possible which is a win-win situation for your business and the environment.



We hope you found this guide helpful.

Over 30,000 businesses are already reducing their carbon impact with First Mile's waste & recycling services.

Contact us for a free waste audit:

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