

Reusing Void Fill Packaging

If your business is like most, you're both *receiving* product in packaging from suppliers, and *buying* new packaging to ship product to your customers. Can the packaging "waste" that comes in be used again, before recycling? This strategy is called **reuse**. A growing number of businesses are discovering its benefits. The greatest savings often occur when a business reuses inbound packaging for outbound shipments. The next best option is to make your "waste" packaging available to another business for their use. Recycling is the next best option after that.

Reuse In-House

The greatest financial benefits typically occur when businesses are able to reuse packaging themselves.

Some of the easiest void fills to reuse are the flowable loosefills. These include polystyrene and corn starch "peanuts". When inbound cartons are unpacked, loosefills can be dumped into polyethylene bags, drums, or gaylords. Reused loosefills require the same amount of storage space as loosefills purchased new.

Some companies find a "peanut vacuum" useful for removing loosefill from cartons and consolidating it with minimal effort. These vacuum peanuts from cartons and consolidate them in a larger container, such as a bulk bin or large poly bag.

Bubble wrap and foam pads are other materials that are relatively easy to separate, consolidate, and reuse without requiring more storage space. In contrast, wadded paper, while reusable, takes up more space than unwadded sheets of purchased paper.

Some businesses shred their waste paper (either office paper or old corrugated boxes) to be used as a void fill.

Case Study

[Set 'N Me Free](#), a Gresham manufacturer of aloe vera products, reuses all incoming void fills, including bubble wrap, expanded polystyrene, and wadded paper, and also makes its own shredded void fill from office paper, saving over \$5,000 annually.

Reuse by Others

If you can't re-use vendor packaging yourself, someone else may be able to.

Materials Exchanges

Materials exchanges are on-line services that make it easy for businesses with surplus or unwanted inventory to find other businesses (or individuals) that are looking for the very same material. A web portal to materials exchanges serving the Pacific Northwest is Northwest Materialsmart: www.nwmaterialsmart.org.

"Reuse" and "Recycling": What's the Difference?

Many people confuse the words "recycling" and "reuse". But from both a financial and an environmental standpoint, "reuse" and "recycling" are very different.

Take expanded polystyrene loose fill for example. **Reuse** involves using the loose fill again *in its original form*. Reuse avoids the need to purchase (and produce) new loosefill. In contrast, **recycling** involves sending the loosefill to a recycler, where it is ground into tiny pieces and used to make new polystyrene products. Both reduce garbage costs, but reuse saves more money because less new loosefill has to be purchased.

Making loosefill from recycled polystyrene requires less energy and virgin resources than polystyrene made entirely from fossil fuels. But reusing loose fill means less polystyrene is produced entirely. Reuse has greater resource savings and pollution reduction. That's why both the EPA and the State of Oregon say that while recycling is good, reuse is often environmentally preferable: reuse first, *and then* recycle.

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Polystyrene Loosefill

Many mailing companies will accept bulk bags of expanded polystyrene loosefill “peanuts” for re-use. The Loosefill Packaging Council’s “Peanut Hotline” (800-828-2214 and <http://www.loosefillpackaging.com/search/default.asp>) identifies locations that accept loosefill for reuse.

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