

Fact Sheet

B-2.3 Understanding Waste Reduction Assessments (Non-regulatory)

The Goal

The goal of a nonregulatory waste reduction assessment by extension agency specialists is to identify opportunities for reducing or eliminating hazardous waste and emissions from small business manufacturing processes. It also aims to provide information about waste reduction technologies that will allow small quantity generators to actually reduce waste.

Solid and hazardous waste specialists perform an assessment in response to requests from companies. These requests usually indicate that a company recognizes that it is generating hazardous waste and has some motivation to reduce or totally eliminate wastes. The initial telephone contact by the company is an important opportunity for getting information about waste generation throughout its facility.

Most generators will call with a question about a specific waste generating process, and some effort may be required to get them to describe what other types of activities occur in their facility. Once a complete picture of the facility is formed, and a time arranged for the assessment, background information on the company and its manufacturing processes are compiled. Regulatory databases are searched to obtain current discharge and disposal data and companies may be asked to provide past years waste data, and descriptions of their manufacturing processes.

This information is used to develop a profile of waste generating processes. Using this profile, background research on waste reduction technologies is conducted and a preliminary packet of waste reduction information is compiled. If a company demonstrates an existing commitment to change, specialists do not normally pursue a detailed justification for waste reduction options based on cost savings or manufacturing efficiencies.

These topics are routinely addressed during the assessment, and the specialist may give direction to a company that wishes to develop such a justification. The time required for such a detailed assessment is typically beyond the scope of extension specialist services.

The Process

The on-site waste reduction assessment normally begins with a short meeting to discuss services the extension specialist can provide. The needs of the company are reviewed and prepared information is presented. The specialist then joins a company representative for a walk-through tour of the plant. This usually follows a logical flow through company operations; reviewed are production processes from either raw material to finished product, or from the waste source to discharge. During this time, other relevant aspects of the facility are examined to identify regulatory compliance problems or other waste reduction opportunities.

Questions relating to the processes are posed to company representatives and line workers with the goal of stimulating thinking about waste reduction as well as clarifying points about waste

generation. The ongoing dialogue between the specialist and company representative is the essential educational opportunity during the assessment. It is usually the best time to reach the individuals responsible for implementing waste reduction and to provide them with motivation, information, and resources. Additional information may be gathered by the specialist on other company concerns. A brief exit interview follows to review any details about the assessment or to answer other questions by company staff. A typical assessment will take two to four hours, depending on the business size and the complexity of the manufacturing process.

Follow-up and Future Assessment Information

Specialists research waste reduction options about specific processes and write a report describing in detail the findings of the assessment and opportunities for implementing waste reduction. This report includes: a description of each waste and the process that generates it; opportunities for reducing the waste; sources of additional information, technology and services to support waste reduction; and a discussion of regulatory, worker health and safety issues related to the use of a new material or process. Copies of the report are submitted to the company and also kept on file with the specialist.

The specialist continues to be available to the company to answer any additional questions that arise during the implementation of the waste reduction option. Specialists can also provide long-term support to companies that must deal with complex issues, or that wish to develop in-house waste reduction programs.

These waste reduction assessments through the extension service are non-regulatory and free of charge. Interested companies can contact their county extension agents for more information.