



PHOTO: Using a recyclable "to go" tray at Boeing's Huntsville, Ala., site cafeteria. *ERIC SHINDELBOWER/BOEING*

Watching our 'waste' line

With employee support, Boeing cafeterias are making changes that are good for the environment

By Bill Seil



PHOTO: Boeing Huntsville's Theresa Owens fills a recyclable cup. *ERIC SHINDELBOWER/BOEING*

Boeing cafeterias are placing environmental responsibility at the top of the menu.

Plastic foam dining materials were recently eliminated from all Boeing cafeterias in the United States. Food service facilities in the Puget Sound region of Washington state are shifting over to compostable plates, trays and bowls.

These efforts are part of a larger plan to move to a fully compostable infrastructure by 2014 at all Shared Services-managed cafeterias where composting facilities exist to support it, according to Terry O'Brien in Shared Services' Facility Operations.

"Boeing is working diligently with our food service providers to implement more environmentally progressive processes into our daily operations," he said. "This is important to our diners, and the direction is embraced by Boeing leadership."

In the Puget Sound region, employees are being asked to toss compostable items—including paper and uneaten food—into special compost containers. These materials are picked up by a composting service that converts them into garden compost. Posters provide instructions for sorting waste into three categories: "compostable," "mixed recycling" and "waste to landfill."

Cindy Dana, Puget Sound food service administrator, said the sorting process becomes routine once employees understand the system.

"Think about how full our cafeteria trash bins have been," Dana said. "In many cases, that's all gone into landfills. If we can divert most of the waste from landfills, we're making an important contribution to our environment and to the next generation."

The number of compostable materials is growing rapidly as food packagers develop new materials for ready-to-go food items. For instance, some vendors offer sandwiches and salads in rigid, plastic-like containers made from a corn-based material that can be processed as compost.

Mixed recycling collection containers are provided for materials such as glass, plastic and tin that will be sorted at a recycling center. Everything that can't be recycled or composted is considered "waste to landfill."



PHOTO: In Renton, Wash., Cindy Dana, right, explains the recycling kiosk to Sue Irvin, left, and Michael Hoyt. *MARIAN LOCKHART/BOEING*

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— John Taylor, Boeing recycling program manager, Huntington Beach, Calif.

"Our goal is a 95 percent recycle-compost rate for all Northwest cafeterias, and I expect we can achieve that in the next year and a half," Dana said. "It depends, in large part, on employee support."

Similar environmental efforts are taking place at Boeing facilities throughout the company and will expand as the availability of recycling and composting facilities grows.

Recycling is taking place at Southern California cafeterias and studies are under way to begin composting food waste. John Taylor, recycling program manager for Huntington Beach, said cooking oil, cardboard and a commingled stream containing plastics, paper, glass, tin cans and wood from the kitchen are being recycled. Other trash from the site is sorted for recyclables at the nearby Rainbow Disposal Materials Recovery Facility.

"Our volume of trash generated by the cafeteria has dramatically decreased and, ultimately, we are planning to achieve zero-waste-to-landfill capability," Taylor said. "Cafeteria personnel have been enthusiastic in their support for these programs."

Rainbow is currently conducting a pilot program with hopes of developing a composting service. If successful, Taylor said, the Huntington Beach cafeteria could begin composting late this year. Seal Beach recently started composting coffee grounds and vegetable scraps for local gardeners and so far it is working well.

Laurel Bennett, food service manager for the Midwest and East, points to additional recent success stories. Huntsville, Ala., became the first Shared Services-supported site to achieve zero-waste-to-landfill status, and the second site, after Salt Lake City, in the company overall. Boeing South Carolina also recently joined the ranks of the zero-waste-to-landfill sites. Boeing's Philadelphia site was the first to eliminate foam plastic dining materials—a policy implemented on Earth Day 2010—and became Boeing's first major production facility to achieve zero-waste-to-landfill status in March this year.

"The new materials take some getting used to for our employees," Bennett said, "but it's a worthwhile effort to create a cleaner, better environment for future generations." ■

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PHOTO: In Huntington Beach, Calif., vendor Rochelle Groh, right, shows Boeing's John Taylor how trash is sorted. *DANA REIMER/BOEING*



PHOTO: Julio Felciano loads used cardboard boxes from the Ridley Park, Pa., cafeteria into an industrial baler. *FRED TROILO/BOEING*



PHOTO: Rochelle Groh, left, and Boeing's John Taylor with crushed, banded materials soon to be recycled. *DANA REIMER/BOEING*