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Maximizing returns: The benefits and best practices of mail-back programs

Mail-back programs are services that allow companies to properly manage their regulated or hard-to-recycle waste materials by returning them by mail to the manufacturer or a designated facility.

These programs are typically used for products such as batteries, electronics, and other regulated materials that cannot be disposed of through traditional means. Businesses can also establish mail-back programs for more common materials such as plastic, paper, and cardboard.

The process for using such a program typically involves working with a third-party provider like Rubicon to ensure the materials are safely packed and shipped to their destination. Once received, they are properly recycled, reused, or repurposed.

Mail-back programs can also be a convenient and cost-effective way for your business to reduce its environmental impact and comply with regulations, such as those mandated for universal waste.



In this white paper, we will explore how mail-back programs can help your business maximize its returns, while at the same time avoiding fines or other penalties associated with improper disposal of regulated materials.

Types of mail-back

One of the simplest ways to distinguish between mail-back programs for your business is to think of them in terms of the materials. Are the materials regulated or non-regulated?

Regulated mail-back

Regulations vary by state, with many states having rules that require retailers and other businesses to recycle certain materials. Your business must comply with these regulations and develop recycling practices that meet the requirements of the states in which you operate. These regulations often include requirements for the recycling of materials such as cardboard, plastic, and glass.

Universal waste is another category that requires a regulated mail-back program. This includes materials such as batteries, light bulbs, and aerosol cans. Setting up a mail-back program will ensure that your business complies with the Federal and State environmental regulations for these waste streams.

Additionally, retailers may be required to provide recycling collection bins for customers. Setting up a system for collecting and sorting recyclable materials and properly managing waste can help your business meet its obligations and reduce its environmental impact.



Non-regulated mail-back

Non-regulated mail-back programs allow your business to easily and sustainably manage items that require special handling,



81%

of respondents felt strongly that companies should be helping to improve the environment

such as single stream recycling (SSR) and personal protective equipment (PPE.) This will help to divert these materials from landfills in areas where diversion programs are not required or may not exist. Additionally, small producing stores that may not have space for a recycling dumpster or wheel cart can establish a non-regulated mail-back program to ensure those materials are being managed responsibly.

Businesses can partner with organizations such as Rubicon to establish these programs, enabling them to send products to a designated processor for proper recycling and alleviate the need for employees to handle and transport the products themselves.

The benefits of mail-back programs

Mail-back programs offer a variety of benefits for both your business and the environment. These benefits include:

Environmental benefits

Mail-back programs allow businesses to responsibly manage regulated and hard-to-recycle waste materials, keeping them out

of landfills and incorporating them into the circular economy that will reuse and recycle these materials, resulting a positive impact on the environment.

Cost-effectiveness

In many cases, fines and penalties for improper management of regulated waste can incur more costs than those of participating in a mail-back program. Implementing these programs protects your business from those costs while promoting environmental responsibility.

Compliance with regulation

When your business establishes a mail-back program, you are complying with best practices for managing regulated materials, which are often mandated by State and Federal Governments.

Customer loyalty and reputation

A survey by Nielsen found that 81 percent of respondents felt strongly that companies should be helping to improve the environment, and that customers are more likely to do business with companies that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. Mail-back programs are an excellent way for your business to showcase its responsibility to the environment and to the community in which it operates.

How to design a successful mail-back program

To maximize the benefits of a mail-back program, participation must be simple and easy to understand. This includes creating clear instructions for how to join the program, as well as providing resources and support for employees and customers alike.

Setting up a user-friendly system

One of the most important aspects of a successful mail-back program is creating a user-friendly system. For retailers, this may include providing clear instructions to customers at the point of sale, as well as offering resources for customers who have questions about the program. It is also important to ensure that employees are trained in the program and understand how it works.

Promoting the program externally

To ensure the success of a mail-back program, it must be promoted effectively. This may include using social media and other marketing channels to raise awareness

of the program, as well as providing incentives for customers who participate.

Maximizing the impact of mail-back program

The impact of a mail-back program relies heavily on the materials on which the program focuses. Mail-back programs that prioritize regulated materials that are difficult to recycle or that must be managed safely will have a positive impact on the environment.

Measuring success and making improvements

Measuring the success of a mail-back program is key to making meaningful improvements over time. This may include tracking participation rates, analyzing employee and customer feedback, and making changes to the program to address any issues or concerns that arise.

158,904 lbs.

of recycled materials since Rubicon and g2 began the program in 2019

Examples of successful mail-back programs

Rubicon partners with g2 revolution to plan and execute mail-back programs for businesses of all sizes and across a range of industries. Participating companies find new uses for regulated and hard-to-recycle materials, identify opportunities for customer savings, and develop sustainable systems of waste management that benefit businesses, the environment, and local communities. Since the program's inception in 2019, Rubicon and g2 have successfully recycled 158,904 lbs. of materials.

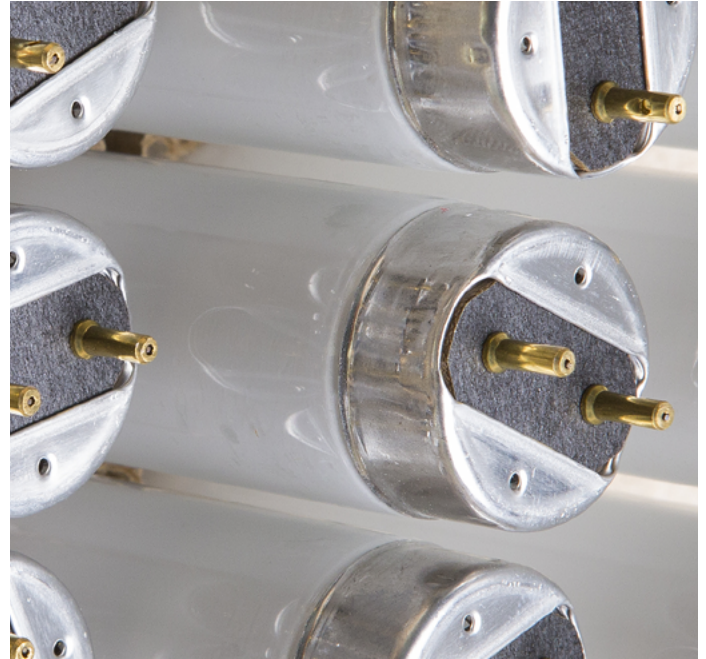
Five Below, a specialty discount store with more than 1,100 locations, has worked closely with Rubicon to safely manage multiple universal waste streams such as batteries, aerosol cans, lamps and light bulbs, cosmetics, and electronics. Five Below expands its mail-back programs each year and is one of the top contributors to Rubicon and g2's annual diversion total. Five Below increased their mail-back material tonnage by 21% in the past year, and by 43% in the past two years. These weight increases are a result of program expansion at current stores and new store launches. In 2023, Five Below plans to implement regulated waste recycling programs at all its store openings in California to comply with local regulations.

Snooze A.M. Eatery, a restaurant chain, has established a mail-back program with Rubicon and g2 revolution for the crayons they give to children in their restaurants. Through this program, discarded crayons are collected in a separate bucket provided by Rubicon that, once full, is shipped to g2 revolution to be sorted, weighed, and recorded. Once the data is recorded, g2 sends the crayons to a waste-to-energy facility that specializes in the handling of those materials. Snooze receives an empty bucket in return, and the process starts again from the beginning.

Conclusion

Mail-back programs offer a variety of benefits for organizations and the environment alike. By taking advantage of these programs, your business can reduce costs, ensure regulatory compliance, and improve your reputation with customers. RUBICONMarketplace™ is an online storefront created by Rubicon in partnership with g2 revolution that is designed to provide businesses of all sizes with the infrastructure to recycle items that may otherwise end up in landfills, such as plastic bags, fluorescent bulbs, alkaline batteries, aerosol cans, and personal protective equipment (PPE). Each box filled contributes directly to a circular economy that creates value out of items that are commonly wasted, thus creating a greener, more sustainable future for all.

To learn more about how Rubicon is deploying its market-leading technology products to equip businesses, local governments, and haulers with the tools and software they need to improve operations, meet sustainability goals, and (ultimately) end waste, visit rubicon.com.



- Reduce costs
- Ensure regulatory compliance
- Improve your reputation with customers

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