

# Waste prevention project example

## Reducing shipping waste

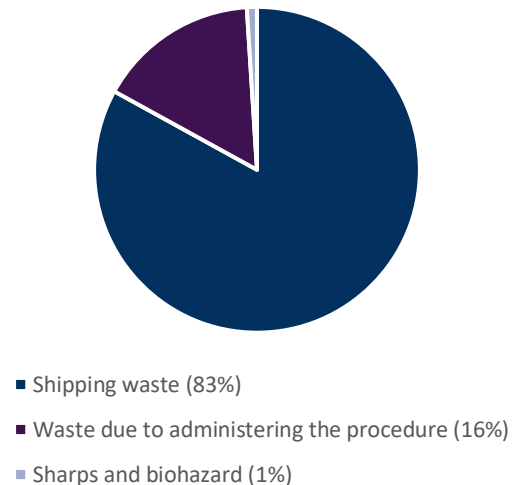


Retina Center of Minnesota wanted to reduce the impact of medical waste on the environment. After doing a waste sort, Retina Center's Minneapolis location discovered shipping materials — polystyrene (Styrofoam™) coolers, cardboard boxes and cold packs— were its biggest source of waste. Those materials can be reused until they're worn out, then the cardboard can be recycled, and the other materials disposed of in the trash.

In 2020, students and staff at Retina Center, along with their pharmaceutical supplier, Pine Pharmaceuticals, explored a project to reduce the amount of shipping materials from the medications they received by reusing the foam coolers, cold packs and cardboard boxes by sending them back to the manufacturer. During the 10-week pilot study, clinic

staff found that foam coolers easily lasted 10 cross-country round trips before becoming too worn and needing to be replaced. Even though minor wear and tear was visible in the coolers, the contents stayed cold and protected throughout the multiple uses. The clinic concluded that government agencies, businesses and their distributors need to work together, and that reduction of foam and other single-use materials is well within reach. "It is great to know reuse of coolers is feasible. But to put this into practice long-term and across our medical field will take motivation and buy-in from our colleagues," says Dr. Emerson of Retina Center.

Retina Center waste composition



## Setting this up at your business

Working with your vendors will be essential. Let them know your interest in reusing shipping materials and the logistics required to do so, such as sending materials back to the vendor. Consider whether the reusable materials will be shipped back or whether a backhaul approach, where shipping materials are picked up by the vendor's courier during new deliveries, would work.

Procedures will need to be put into place to ensure materials are taken back and reused:

- Designated areas in a courier truck or at the vendor's site for materials intended for reuse
- Limiting the use of new shipping materials unless old materials are no longer suitable for reuse.

### **Costs to consider**

- Shipping and handling.
- Storage of shipping materials at your location until they are sent back to the manufacturer
- Potential added fees from the manufacturer
- Since cardboard, polystyrene, common ice packs, shipping peanuts or bubble wrap can wear down over time or become damaged, you and your vendors can consider purchasing sturdier substitutes intended for longer, if not indefinite, reuse. Storage space for reusable items

### **Waste prevention grants available**

Hennepin County has a grant program to fund projects that prevent waste in the business sector. Areas of focus include replacing disposables with reusables, food waste prevention and innovative projects around research and development (to prevent waste). Learn more and apply at: [hennepin.us/businesswasteprevention](https://hennepin.us/businesswasteprevention)

### **Contact**

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