



# ADVANCING RECYCLING FROM AIRCRAFT CABINS

## Strategies for Small-Hub & Non-Hub Airports

More than 300 small-hub and non-hub airports in the United States handle more than 80 million passenger enplanements annually. These passengers generate an estimated 20,000 tons of waste onboard aircraft. Approximately 25 to 35 percent of deplaned waste by weight consists of valuable recyclables such as aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and paper.

Smaller airports often serve smaller aircraft with shorter flights, and they are less likely to have full catering operations. At these airports, airlines typically dispose of their waste in airport-managed containers, rather than developing their own airline-managed system for waste handling.

Significant opportunities are available at these airports for recycling materials from in-flight service. Even in regions with less robust recycling programs, stable markets usually exist for materials such as aluminum cans and newspaper, which can generate revenues from recycling.

### THE BUSINESS CASE—WHY RECYCLE?

Disposing of aircraft waste at small airports costs millions of dollars annually. Meanwhile, valuable recyclables are thrown away as garbage. While some small-hub and non-hub airports already recycle, opportunities remain to increase recycling of waste from passenger terminals and deplaned from aircraft. A well-designed and well-managed recycling program benefits airports and airlines through improved economies of scale, reduced disposal costs, and increased passenger satisfaction. Effective recycling can also help meet state or local recycling requirements and build a positive green image. This summary sheet and the associated document, *ACRP Report 100: Recycling Best Practices—A Guidebook for Advancing Recycling from Aircraft Cabins*, focus on recycling deplaned materials. Airport-wide recycling is addressed elsewhere, such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's guide, *Developing and Implementing an Airport Recycling Program*.

### BUILDING ON EXISTING SYSTEMS

At airports across the United States, deplaned waste and recyclables from aircraft are typically directed either to

- An **airport-managed** system, in which cabin service crews or terminal maintenance personnel—or flight attendants, on smaller aircraft—take materials to waste or recycling containers owned or operated by the airport or its contractor. At small hubs and non-hubs, this arrangement is more common than airlines having their own separate waste systems.
- An **airline-managed** system, in which **either**:
  - Flight kitchen crews take materials to flight kitchens or in-house airline provisioning operations for handling, **or**
  - Cabin service crews place materials in containers owned or operated by the airline or its contractor.

At airports where recycling infrastructure is not available or easily accessible to airlines, including some smaller airports, airlines may back-haul or transport recyclables to another location with the appropriate recycling services. The recycling best practices summarized here fully utilize and expand on the existing airport- and airline-managed systems for handling waste and recyclables. The parent document to this summary sheet, *ACRP Report 100: Recycling Best Practices—A Guidebook for Advancing Recycling from Aircraft Cabins*, provides more information.

Separate summary sheets are available for large-hub and medium-hub airports, airlines, and flight kitchens.



# Best Practices

## for Recycling from Aircraft Cabins at Small-Hub & Non-Hub Airports

### STRATEGIES FOR GETTING STARTED

Communication and teamwork form the basis for effective recycling. Airports can work with airline station managers to understand specific airline recycling needs and to develop and promote recycling procedures. Building on this partnership, smaller airports can implement the following **best practices** to develop effective recycling programs.

#### **Secure top-down and bottom-up commitment within the airport for recycling efforts.**

Leading airport recycling programs combine executive leadership with the active support of frontline employees. At a smaller airport, only a few staff and managers may be directly involved in the waste system, so obtaining their support and participation is key to success.

**Develop consistent recycling procedures and infrastructure.** Waste haulers often offer recycling, as do recycling companies and nonprofit organizations teaching job skills. Work with your recycling hauler and program participants to develop clear recycling procedures that support success. Providing clearly marked recycling containers paired with all waste containers is a key part of a consistent, effective recycling system throughout the airport.

**Increase the efficiency of existing systems.** Right-sizing waste dumpsters and collection schedule can create space for a dedicated recycling container. Switching to compacting waste containers can be an easy way to save on disposal costs immediately.

**Track, evaluate, and share data on program performance.** Tracking airline-specific recycling rates, waste quantities, and cost savings can improve and demonstrate recycling benefits. Airports can request reports from their waste haulers on quantities and costs of waste and recycling services and share results with airlines to support participation.

**Make recycling part of everyday business** by providing education, training, and support to airport personnel, concessionaires, and others—and celebrate success. Smaller airports can hold in-person meetings with airline station managers and extend invitations to attend airport training sessions to support recycling. Providing ongoing education and training can improve program results, while sharing program achievements can demonstrate commitment to recycling and sustainable business practices.



Akron-Canton Airport (CAK) worked with the Stark-Tuscarawas-Wayne Joint Solid Waste Management District to provide recycling infrastructure and collection services at the airport for no additional charge. All airlines are encouraged to use the system.



The passenger terminal at Lafayette Airport (LFT) recycles aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and paper through a local non-profit's job training program. To expand beyond public area recycling, the airport sent a letter to all airlines and other tenants inviting them to participate.

### OPTIONS FOR TAKING YOUR PROGRAM TO THE NEXT LEVEL

- Conduct periodic waste assessments to identify recycling opportunities.
- Separate waste disposal and recycling costs in tenant lease agreements, so that airlines and other tenants have a direct financial incentive to reduce waste and increase recycling.
- Foster collaboration and support industry-wide recycling by sharing best practices and lessons learned with other airports and regional airlines.

### RESOURCES

- ACRP Report 100: *Recycling Best Practices—A Guidebook for Advancing Recycling from Aircraft Cabins* (2014)
- USEPA's *Developing and Implementing an Airport Recycling Program* (2009)
- FAA's *Recycling, Reuse and Waste Reduction at Airports: A Synthesis Document* (2013)



Some airports use college interns to provide one-on-one recycling training to tenants. These partnerships support recycling at the airport and provide meaningful work experience for the students, at little cost to the airport.