

Earthwise: Department of Corrections' Central Distribution Center



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Beth Casper, Special to the Statesman Journal 5:08 a.m. PDT June 5, 2016



Inmates at the Adults in custody at the Department of Corrections Central Distribution Center dismantle various electronic items for recycling. (Photo: Special to the Statesman Journal)

The Oregon Department of Corrections' Central Distribution Center is a 250,000-square-foot warehouse that stores food, clothing, office supplies and necessities for the 14,600 adults in custody and 4,500 staff members in 14 state prisons across the state.

It's a huge operation — like running a small city — but the agency manages to run it all with the environmental impact of something similar to a block of apartment buildings.

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The warehouse has space in it to store items purchased in bulk, which saves money but also contains packaging on everything from toilet paper to food. Another section of the warehouse has a workshop, where adults in custody fix or repurpose broken furniture and office supplies. In another area, stockpiles of materials can be stored until an appropriate recycle or reuse market can be found.

The agency saved \$247,000 last year by reusing unwanted furniture and office supplies that were donated, returned from prisons, fixed, or repurposed. DOC staff found markets for hard-to-recycle items. In 2015, for example, 18,065 pounds of shoes, 486 pounds of ballistic vests, and 639 pounds of mattress foam were recycled.

Last year, the warehouse processed more than 1.5 million pounds of recyclables.

It's no wonder that in March the Department of Corrections earned the 2016 Mid-Valley Green Award for Sustainable Business of the Year, after earning its EarthWISE certification in 2013.

Department of Corrections is one of 160 EarthWISE businesses and organizations in Marion County. To earn certification, businesses meet criteria in categories, such as water conservation, recycling, waste reduction and energy usage.

With 14 institutions scattered around the state, trucks come and go from the DOC warehouse every day to pick up items bound for another state prison.

"These trucks that delivered products were coming back empty or partly empty," said Chad Naugle, Sustainability Programs Manager. "We decided we should backhaul clean recyclables and then sort them on our sort line. Then we could see if we can get any revenue with the recyclables."

Now, trucks return from their deliveries packed with not only the usual recyclable items, but with such things as: 5-gallon plastic buckets, ballistic vests, clear shrink wrap film, fabric and textiles, shoes, foam, wood, lead, brass, fluorescent bulbs and ballasts, electronic waste, CDs, appliances, and chip bags. Most metal waste is sold to scrap metal dealers by individual institutions to supplement their own revenue to maintain their institution sustainability programs.

The recycle center brings in around \$60,000 in annual revenues from the sale of recyclables such as cardboard. That income offsets hard-to-recycle commodities such as fabric, e-waste, shoes, ballistic vests, tires, and batteries.



(Photo: Special to the Statesman Journal)

For fabric alone, Naugle researched and set up arrangements with more than five different organizations. The fabrics are sorted into type and then sent to the appropriate recycling facility.

Used denim is being made into insulation through a nonprofit called “[Blue Jeans Go Green](#)” denim recycling.

Cotton/poly fabrics are made into industrial wiping rags, acoustical sound dampening products, automotive insulation, mattress/pillow filler, and carpet padding.

Ballistic vests are sent to Fiber Brokers in Alabama where they are repurposed into brake pads, gloves, fiber optics, ropes, automotive seat padding, tires, and insulation.

Used shoes are shipped out to [Shoes for a Cure](#) and St. Pauly Textiles where they are donated to disaster relief efforts or ground up for resurfacing projects.

Blankets are donated to the Salem Sleeping Bag Project.

But that's not the end of the story: recycling markets are constantly changing, requiring Naugle to research new markets all the time.

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“I do research, find an outlet and send our items,” Naugle said. “Then I’ll get an email and they say we no longer take this commodity. I go back to square one and find another outlet. We keep collecting it until we can find another market for it. With a big warehouse, we can hold certain things until arrangements can be made to responsibly recycle that item.”

The warehouse also houses a reuse-refurbish center that acts like a free Craigslist for the prisons. Broken furniture from other state agencies is delivered to the warehouse where inmates fix the item. Then it is delivered to a state employee who needs that item.

“The adults in custody fix the items up: put chairs back together, lacquer tables, repurpose desks and color and stain it the way (the requesting employee) wants it,” Naugle said. “It is a way to save money as an agency instead of buying new stuff. And we try to have nothing go to the landfill. If we can’t fix it, we will take it apart and recycle it.”

Since 2013, the Reuse Center has saved the department more than \$500,000.

The warehouse’s ability to store thousands of pounds of material and unused or broken furniture means that the DOC has drastically reduced the waste headed to the landfill.

Mill Creek Correctional Facility alone reduced its garbage hauling fees by 75 percent. In the past, the facility’s garbage dumpster pick-up was weekly. Now, the bin is emptied once a month. This saves \$300 per pick-up or \$10,575 a year.

Santiam Correctional Institution was able to reduce its garbage hauling fees by 50 percent.

But the impact of the warehouse’s sustainability practices doesn’t end there. Naugle points to the skills learned by the adults in custody who work in the recycle/reuse center. Not only are they learning inventory, carpentry, maintenance, and quality control skills, but they are learning that sustainability makes sense for the environment and for the budget.

For more information about the EarthWISE program, go to www.mcEarthWISE.net or call 503-365-3188.