



Keeping Teel's Plastic Out of the Landfills: Partnership Increases Recycling at Teel

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Background

Teel Plastics, Inc. is continually seeking ways to do business in a socially responsible manner, and one of its targets is reducing environmental impact. Given that plastics have a poor reputation for environmental impact, it is important that plastics manufacturers take responsible measures to reduce their waste for the good of the environment and the industry.

Teel has been striving to reduce its waste generation and increase its recycling for years. In 2018, Teel renovated its grinding area to allow more materials to be reused internally. In addition, Teel reduces waste by sourcing corrugated packaging with a high percentage of recycled content and collaborating with several customers for returnable and reusable packaging.

In a positive new step, Teel is significantly reducing the waste it sends to landfills by partnering with Industrial Recycling Services (IRS), a waste management company headquartered in Newton, North Carolina. IRS, now the primary recycling partner for Teel's two main manufacturing facilities, allows Teel to reduce the waste it sends to landfills by an estimated 100 tons annually.

A Long-Sought Recycling Partnership Materializes

For years, Teel had difficulty finding a firm willing to recycle scrap from its Hitchcock Street facility, which includes mixed plastics, metal, and cardboard with various contaminants like adhesives and tape residue. Teel invited IRS to examine the scrap and assess their capability to recycle it. IRS determined it could do so as part of a larger partnership with Teel that included handling the waste from the Teel Court facility as well. Teel felt the opportunity the partnership created for recycling more of its waste made it the right move. For the Hitchcock Street facility specifically, IRS's services reduced trash to landfill by an estimated 90%, taking the facility to essentially zero manufacturing waste to landfill.



Figure 1: A bundle of plastic wrap set to be recycled by IRS that otherwise would have been sent to a landfill

Bill Chmelka, Teel's senior manager of supply chain and procurement, initiated the partnership. He says the move will help Teel meet its goal of "being a good environmental partner to the community, being a good environmental partner to our customers, being a good environmental partner to our suppliers." Over a period of months, Teel met with numerous firms offering recycling services but chose IRS, Chmelka said, for "their willingness to partner with Teel. Other recyclers were very interested in our materials and were willing to pay for specific materials but they were not interested in supporting all of Teel's recycling needs. Some of our recycling needs required value added from the recycling company. Whereas other recyclers were not interested in fully supporting Teel, the IRS team was very willing to work with us to find a solution that worked for both companies."



Figure 2: Additional recycling bins were brought in to capture the new types of waste to be recycled

The partnership has significantly reduced the amount of waste Teel sends to the landfill. It also allowed Teel to engage its customers and others as participants in the partnership. Teel has two customers that are now returning some packaging materials and scrap parts for Teel recycle. The collaboration with customers lead to landfill waste reduction in the supply chain further downstream and was one of the goals of working with IRS. This not only provides environmental benefit, it allows customer to meet their own sustainability goals.

Chmelka's goal of seeing Teel's customers benefit from the partnership, in turn leading to further environmental benefit, has been realized. "We've started a partnership with a local customer to return their recyclable packaging (corrugated and shrink wrap). This allowed them to reduce their waste to landfill footprint and costs, ultimately adding strength and value to the supply chain. My goal is to bring more customers into this type of partnership. Providing sustainability services to our customers to separate us from other plastics suppliers," he said.

Christian Herrild, Teel's director of growth strategies, said, "Moving Teel toward being a zero manufacturing waste to landfill company is important long term. It's important to our customers, it's important to our ownership, and it's important to our employees."



There has been a lot of negativity toward plastic waste recently Herrild added and “we want to set a positive example for the industry and the community.” Herrild noted the program will cost Teel more in the short term, but he hopes they will see many long-term gains. “It’s an investment in the future,” he said.

Tracking Our Progress

As of September 2019, Teel has kept **26.72** tons of waste out of the landfill.

	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>August</i>	<i>September</i>
Reduction of Tons to Landfill	6.67	9.91	7.76	2.40
Total Tons Reduced	6.67	16.57	24.33	26.72

Figure 1: Tons of waste kept out of the landfill with Teel’s recycling partnership with IRS

Using the [EPA’s conversion factor](#), the 26.72 tons of waste kept out of the landfill equates to a reduction of **76.69 metric tons of CO₂** expelled into the atmosphere as well.

Chmelka expressed his satisfaction with the efforts of the entire Teel team: “Personally, I’m extraordinarily proud of how the Teel family has embraced the challenge of becoming zero waste to landfill. We’ve recently launched a plastic film recycling initiative at our facility and we’ve also created a Sustainability Team that will continue the positive momentum.”

For more information, please contact [Bill Chmelka](#).