

## Materials Exchanges and Swap Sites

### What is a Material Exchange" and a "Swap Site"?

A Materials Exchange is a listing of unwanted or surplus materials based on the premise that one business's discards can be another business's feedstock. It can help businesses find a market or an end user for materials they no longer need. A Materials Exchange is a "reuse" program, it enables businesses to use existing materials rather than virgin feedstock, which conserves valuable resources and keeps existing products from being landfilled.

A Materials Exchange typically lists businesses from a larger geographical area, one or several states. When larger amounts of materials are available, it may be economical to transport them further.

For example: A furniture company in Michigan, Herman Miller, produces 800,000 pounds of scrap fabric annually. Through a materials exchange with a North Carolina company, the material is now used as insulation for car-roof linings and dashboards rather than being landfilled. This saves \$50,000 a year in landfill fees.

A Swap Site is also a listing but local in scope. It serves residents and small businesses by making available items for the household, office, garage and garden, usually for free. For example: a couch, a refrigerator or an aquarium.

### How do they operate?

Both the Materials Exchange and the Swap Site are actually information exchanges. Neither one is an actual place where people can drop off or pick up materials or goods. They do not handle the materials. For information on setting up a 2% program with a physical site, see the Factsheet on "Reuse Promotion Campaign". Materials Exchanges and Swap Sites compile information about available or wanted materials, and list that information in a catalog, a newsletter, a newspaper or on an electronic bulletin board service. The businesses or residents contact one another directly to establish the actual exchange.

### A Materials Exchange or a Swap Site?

A Swap Site tends to be local in scope, and starting one is an opportunity appropriate for a Wasteshed to undertake. A Swap Site lists information either on paper or on the World Wide Web. Under "Existing Programs" below are a few examples. BRING, in Eugene has a Swap Site in their quarterly newsletter. Corvallis Disposal put their Swap Site on a website. Another option is to have an agreement with an existing local newspaper or publication to list weekly, or on another regular basis, available and wanted goods for free, and promote and track the service.

A Materials Exchange typically deals with industrial and chemical materials in large quantities that tend to travel longer distances from seller to buyer. They may require a large "audience" for sellers to locate appropriate buyers and vice versa. This makes it less likely that an individual wasteshed can set up an effective Materials Exchange.

IMEX (Industrial Materials Exchange) is a free service provided by King County, WA, designed to help businesses in Washington, Oregon, British Columbia and part of Idaho find markets for their industrial by-products, surplus materials and wastes. At any given time 10 to 20% of the listings on IMEX are from Oregon or southwest Washington businesses. The most effective way for a wasteshed to assist its businesses to place or find materials, is to refer them to IMEX. Information on IMEX can be found under "Existing Programs" below.

### Advantages of a Swap Site

Swap Sites are both cost effective and environmentally beneficial. They provide savings:

- To the party generating the goods: avoid paying disposal cost
- To the party receiving the goods: less expensive than buying the goods new
- To the community: reduces the volume of municipal solid waste disposed of



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- To the environment: decreases the use of raw materials and less energy used to process those materials.

### How to Start a Swap Site

Before deciding to start a Swap Site, think through what is needed to set one up:

- Is staffing available to develop, manage and track the Site?
- Are resources available to develop and promote a Swap Site? A Website?
- Who is the target audience?
- What type of materials will be listed, not listed? For example, most Sites do not list safety items such as bike helmets or children's car seats, and household hazardous waste such as pesticides or used automobiles. Decisions on these materials will determine the categories of items you list on your Site.

Once these questions have been answered:

1. Identify how the listings will be made available. Some options include local daily paper; weekly paper; newsletter, the Internet.
2. Develop a name for your program.
3. Identify who will be responsible for managing the listing of materials. Responsibilities include:
  - Taking calls from the public.
  - Updating the list (adding and removing listings).
  - Keeping track of the actual number of transactions.
  - Delivering the updated list to the paper or newsletter.
4. Develop the specifics for how the program will work, the format of the listings, etc.
5. To launch your site, identify at least a dozen initial items to be listed. Suggestions for the first listings:

Wanted Materials:

- Polystyrene peanuts - pack, ship & mail centers.
- Appliances - used appliance dealers and large appliance repair businesses (these groups often seek appliances to refurbish and resell).
- Art Supplies - bottle caps, wine corks, miscellaneous small plastic parts (schools, other art programs and children's museums often seek a variety of materials for creative programs).

Available Materials:

- Pallets - any warehouse.
  - Industry Waste - examine the industries in your community, and seek materials that may be of use to someone else in the community (such as fabric scraps, sawdust, paint).
6. Facilitate an actual exchange between two parties that can be reported in the paper to introduce the program. Promote the event.
  7. Continually advertise and provide feedback on how the program is working. Examples of ways to promote the program include: newspaper advertisements, signage on trash trucks, recycling hotline, brochures.

### Referrals to Existing Sites and Exchanges Swap Sites:

- Corvallis Disposal Swapsite: <http://www.disposal.com/swapsite/home/ind ex.html>. Contact Bronwyn Evans at [evns@disposal.com](mailto:evns@disposal.com).
- BMEX, BRING Materials Exchange, an exchange for free stuff. Contact Sarah Grimm at BRING at (541) 746-3023 or at [bring@efn.org](mailto:bring@efn.org).
- The Free Market, a listing service for the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN) residents who want to get or give free reusable goods for the home, garage, and garden: <http://www.twincitiesfreemarket.org/>.
- The City of Brockville, Ontario, Canada at <http://www.brockville.reuses.com/>

Materials Exchanges:

- IMEX - Industrial Materials Exchange, King County Dept. of Public Health, Seattle, WA. Contact Bill Lawrence at (206) 296-4899, or at [imex@metrokc.gov](mailto:imex@metrokc.gov). Or check out the IMEX website at <http://www.metrokc.gov/hazwaste/imex>
- RBME - Reusable Building Materials Exchange, an Internet based service that offers listings for several counties in Washington. Contact at <http://www.rbme.com>.



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- Portland State Chemical Consortium provides laboratory chemical exchange for schools, hospitals and government agencies. Contact at (503) 725-4273, or at <http://www-adm.pdx.edu/user/pcc/default.htm>.
- SoilTrader, a regional information sharing network for non-hazardous soil, fencing, woody debris, asphalt, concrete, etc., is operated by the City of Portland at <http://www.enviro.ci.portland.or.us/soiltrader>. Or call Margaret Nover at (503) 823-7623.
- CalMAX is an industrial exchange program sponsored by the California Integrated Waste Management Board.. Contact at (916) 255-2369 or <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMax/>.
- A fairly complete listing of most of the Materials Exchanges currently operating in the US and Canada <http://www.enviroworld.com/Resources/matexchs.html>.



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