

Perfectly Good Stuff, and Nowhere to Put It

The Challenge: Surplus in Dumpsters. Perfectly Good Stuff ...

Drexel is one of America's best science and engineering schools, growing rapidly and bulging out of its urban Philadelphia campus.

Like every large organization, Drexel turns over a lot of furniture. There are constant renovations and refits; there are new managers buying new furniture and getting rid of old; there are planned replacements of dorm, classroom, laboratory and administrative furnishings and equipment; there's a constant stream of old furniture discarded in ones and twos.

As a leader in environmental science and engineering, Drexel practices what it preaches. Drexel has a longstanding commitment to sustainability in energy use, building practices, waste reduction and recycling.

... and Nowhere to Put It

In 2010 Drexel began to look at surplus assets as a potential target for reuse or recycling. Drexel realized that most of its surplus furniture and equipment could be reused – or if not reused then recycled for material value. But Drexel had no way to make this happen. Its campus is congested, access to many buildings is difficult, and there is literally no space on-campus to store new or surplus furniture. Drexel couldn't warehouse furniture against the possibility it could be reused; once it left campus for a warehouse, the cost to handle, store, track, and ultimately bring surplus back to campus is far more than the cost simply to purchase new. Drexel's surplus was just being thrown away.

Solution: Less-Than-Truckload Reuse

Drexel has a relationship with Corporate Interiors (CI), a regional Steelcase furniture dealer who has installed, moved, and stored furnishings for Drexel for many years. Independently Drexel had also heard about IRN's Surplus Property program, which moves millions of pounds of surplus annually into U.S. and international disaster relief and development initiatives. Drexel asked CI and IRN to propose an alternative to throwing their surplus in the dumpster.

In June 2010 IRN and CI proposed a solution.

CI has trucks on or close to Drexel's campus two or three days a week. CI proposed to set up a simple order management system for Drexel. When any Drexel department has surplus (as little as one or two pieces), they call CI with basic information: item count, description, location, schedule. The next time CI has a truck in the area, they swing by, pick up the surplus, and take it back to their warehouse.



At its warehouse, when CI accumulates enough surplus to fill a container (about 175 pieces), they call IRN with the inventory. IRN makes a match against the needs of its nonprofit partners and sends a trailer or overseas shipping container. CI loads the container, and it is shipped for reuse.

For Drexel, the program is as simple as a phone call. For CI the program is as simple as extending the routes of trucks already on the road.

Pickups at Drexel started in July 2010. Drexel filled its first container inside six weeks, and since then (through January 2011) CI has filled and shipped six more containers.

Benefits: Nothing But Winners

CI reports back to Drexel the quantity and destination of all the surplus removed from campus. Drexel can quantify the reduction of its waste stream and disposal costs and the improvement in its recycling rate. Drexel gets a great public relations story and a meaningful enhancement in its Sustainability program.

Drexel also benefits financially. Every item kept out of a dumpster reduces waste hauling and landfill costs. Drexel is paying CI to take surplus from its campus, but because CI is taking advantage of backhauls and warehouse space that would otherwise be empty, CI's rates are more than competitive with disposal.

And most important, Drexel's surplus is enriching the lives of desperately needy people. Through January 2011, furniture and equipment from Drexel has been provided to communities in Haiti, Nicaragua, Jamaica, and El Salvador. Stuff that would otherwise have been tossed in the dumpster will be appreciated and given a second life for many years to come.

A Comprehensive Reuse/Recycling Program

Less-than-truckload surplus is only one element in a comprehensive program to reuse and recycle surplus property. For most schools, Drexel included, the majority of surplus is generated in large furniture replacement and renovation projects – for example, when dorm furniture is replaced on schedule, or when a building is emptied for renovation.

On large projects like these, IRN secures a pre-project inventory which it matches against the needs of its charitable partners, and organizes labor to remove the surplus on the generator's schedule. When the project date arrives, IRN coordinates trailers to arrive and be "live-loaded" and shipped to recipient organizations. Items damaged or otherwise unsuitable for reuse are recycled for wood or metal value.

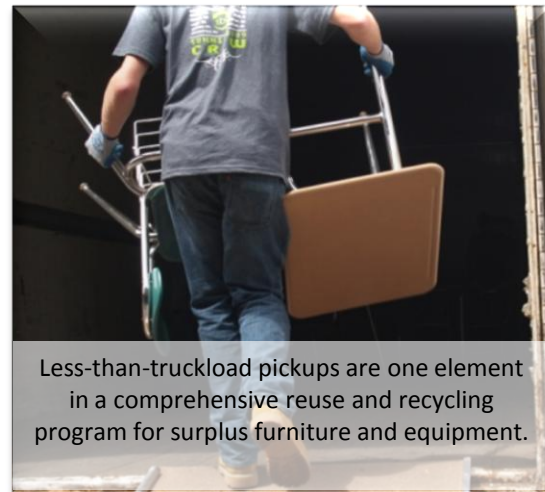
At the end of the day, a comprehensive approach to surplus property management results in nearly 100% reuse and recycling, saves money, and sends virtually nothing to the landfill.



When CI accumulates enough surplus from Drexel and other generators, IRN sends in a shipping container to be loaded and transported to relief organizations.



Unloading in Haiti. Drexel and other surplus is used for disaster relief and economic development.



Less-than-truckload pickups are one element in a comprehensive reuse and recycling program for surplus furniture and equipment.