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Innovative StopWaste.org Campaign Lands \$499K EPA Award

BUSINESS / ENVIRONMENT [Nate Seltenrich](#) — Tue, May 10, 2011 at 8:00 AM

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Last February **we wrote about a unique campaign called Use Reusables** being promoted by Alameda County waste-reduction organization **StopWaste.org**. The idea behind it was to encourage the use of reusable packaging in commercial and industrial settings. It ain't sexy, but the potential benefits are massive: diversion of tons of plastic, cardboard, and wood from landfills, and huge reductions in greenhouse gas emissions related to processing and transportation. There's also a strong financial case to be made: Businesses pay more for reusable totes now and save thousands on cardboard boxes down the line. Our headline "Go Green, Save Green" was nothing if not apropos.







Well, it looks like the federal government finally caught on to this one-of-a-kind program. Last week StopWaste announced it had secured a grant worth nearly \$500,000 from the **Environmental Protection Agency**. Awarded under the agency's Climate Showcase Communities program, the grant allows StopWaste to go national with Use Reusables and spread its message (and, in some cases, money) well beyond the East Bay. Approximately \$180,000 of the award is earmarked for direct financial assistance to help businesses get their new reusable systems off the ground. The remainder goes to training and logistics support.

In recent years, StopWaste has helped a number of East Bay companies ditch disposable packaging for reusable options. Oakland's **Peerless Coffee** replaced cardboard boxes with plastic totes to distribute its coffee throughout the Bay Area. San Leandro's **Ghiradelli Chocolate Company** did the same and is projected to save \$2.6 million in packaging costs over five years while keeping 350 tons of soiled cardboard from the landfill. More recently, Oakland's **Premier Organics** received \$5,000 from StopWaste to research reusable stretch-wrap for its pallets and hopefully save huge quantities of plastic sheeting from meeting an ignoble end at the dump.

The new EPA grant allows StopWaste to spend the next three years working with the nationwide **Reusable Packaging Association** to develop a more robust curriculum for its existing training program, provide on-site logistical support, and reach out to businesses across the country. Going national, the campaign has the potential to eliminate the equivalent of at least 1.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year, according to StopWaste's projections. That's like taking 294,000 cars off the road.

The campaign will be particularly geared toward business-to-business distribution and retail, which are the two industries best poised to take advantage of reusable packaging in the United States, said StopWaste reusables program manager **Justin Lehrer**. But the US trails Europe by a wide margin in reusable packaging, so there's much work to do. Here's to hoping that when the funds run out in 2014, more follow closely behind.

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