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Resource Recovery: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Report Addressing Waste Stream Opportunities (Includes Walmart Case Study)

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The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation ("Foundation") has issued a report titled *Trash to Treasure: Changing Waste Streams to Profit Streams* ("Report").

The *Report* is authored by Dr. Lawrence Bowdish.

The Foundation *Report* describes waste production as a serious problem for United States companies/industries. However, the *Report* notes that there are:

... significant opportunities for companies to properly value their waste streams and make changes to their processes to take greater advantage of cost savings and new profit streams.

The *Report* characterizes these efforts as "circular economy thinking" and includes Walmart as one of the companies whose efforts it assesses.

Key findings from the *Report* include:

- The 5,589 largest publicly traded companies in the US sent 342 million metric tons of waste to landfills and incinerators in 2014.
- On average, companies generate 7.81 metric tons of waste for every million dollars in revenue.
- If the 5,589 companies in the study reduced paper waste by 1%, it would save them nearly \$1 billion.
- Overall, company waste is paper (37%), food/other organic materials (21%), plastic (17%), construction materials (11%), and metals (8%).
- Wasting is becoming more expensive. In the past 15 years, food costs have increased 66%, paper 16%, metals and minerals 90%.
- Many companies have already identified waste as an issue and are increasing their profits by changing production process to reduce waste, educating their workforce, and engaging with consumers to recover or refurbish items.
- One of the most comprehensive ways to eliminate waste is to adopt a circular economy model, where products and services are designed and manufactured to be refurbished and repaired throughout their lifecycles.

The *Report* concludes that understanding the size and value of a company's waste stream enables it to monetize it. As a result, it is suggested that companies can:

- Reduce waste going to landfills and incinerators

- Develop long term solutions such as
- Incorporating more sustainable closed-loop manufacturing processes to limit waste
- Shifting to a circular economy in which waste is designed out entirely

The section of the *Report* addressing Walmart's efforts states that the company has a "broad-focused program that incorporates Sustainable Design in manufacturing" which "looks at the entire lifecycle of the products it sources and sales." It also states that Walmart begins this process by:

... working deep in its supply chain to examine what goes into its products, and it works with all types of suppliers to impact how its products are packaged and how much reclaimed and recycled material go into the product. The company also works with partners that help their suppliers become more efficient by eliminating waste and increasing energy efficiency.

Walmart is also stated to track key data across 50 separate waste categories in order to make more efficient decisions about reducing waste. It cites as an example, the company's food and waste damage reduction campaign that helped "keep an estimated 30 million units of food from becoming waste."

[Click here to download a copy of the *Report*.](#)