

How good are Swedish stores at waste management and recycling?

The level of knowledge surrounding waste management and recycling is growing among store staff and retailers. In addition, there are many chains of stores that now have central directives for waste management and recycling. This is important for several reasons, in part because we are able to build a more sustainable society, but also because this helps to cut down on time, space and transport, not to mention protecting the health of store staff by giving them better means by which to handle waste. But there's still a lot left to do...

We've spoken with three people who are responsible for waste management in three types of store, from a small food shop to one of the biggest department stores in the world. We asked them how they tackle waste management and recycling in their businesses on a day-to-day basis.

Magnus Thor, Store Manager, Hemköp Supermarket in Sweden:

The Hemköp store in Vrigstad is the only one in the area and has a loyal customer base. The store has sales of around 40 million SEK a year. As the store has grown quickly over the years, so has the amount of waste that needs to be processed.



"We used to have a container where we threw more or less all our general waste. We've made significant improvements since then and do what we can to process and recycle as much of our waste as possible.

"This is primarily the case for corrugated cardboard, plastic, and food waste. The majority of our waste is corrugated cardboard. We send this for recycling as it is, and this generates an income for us. Although we've had a baler for quite some time, we've recently upgraded to one with greater capacity. This enables us to cut down on the time staff spend dealing with waste, as well as cutting down considerably on transport.

"In addition, we've arranged for a number of local farmers to come and collect our waste fruit, which they can use as animal feed – a win-win for both parties. Nevertheless, we still use our mixed container for general waste, and I think we could do better at sorting what we throw in there. We could probably go even further than that, but I think we do a good job with the resources we have."

Johan Ekenberg, retailer, ICA Supermarket "Olskroken" in Sweden:

ICA Supermarket Olskroken is located in central Gothenburg. Sixty people work in the store, which turns over around 175 million SEK a year.

"Waste management is a natural part of our employees' day-to-day work. We have around ten recycling fractions, including corrugated cardboard, plastic, clear and coloured glass, and compost. The plastic wrapped around pallets and boxes gets sent back with the ICA truck to be turned into plastic boxes. We handle 140 tonnes of corrugated cardboard a year, which corresponds to around 80 percent of all our waste.

"If we didn't have a compactor to do the hard work for us, the situation would be untenable and the warehouse would be swamped. We've upgraded the machine as we've grown. Our briquette press compresses the boxes and packaging into briquettes, which we then send away and are paid for.



"Our waste management is in line with the ICA environmental store concept. We're accredited and have been tested in accordance with the specific requirements of the concept, which include waste management and recycling. In addition, these requirements cover efficient energy use, stocking a wide range of environmentally adapted products, and avoiding the use of unnecessary chemicals."

Inge Nilsson, waste and environment manager, Gekås Superstore in Sweden:

Gekås in Ullared is one of Sweden's most popular places to visit and is thought to be the world's largest department store. A department store with 4.8 million customers and sales of 5.3 billion SEK a year certainly generates a lot of waste.



"Corrugated cardboard and plastic account for the majority of our waste. We process and recycle 3,000 tonnes of corrugated cardboard every year. We have a number of machines to assist in waste management and I take an active and systematic approach to optimising our preventative maintenance efforts.

"We use balers for processing and recycling plastic, and briquette presses to compress boxes into briquettes. We find that these machines are essential for our business. Any interruption results in problems in the warehouse.

"We work actively with our supplier to continuously optimise our flows, as well as to optimise space when transporting waste, to ensure cost-effectiveness. The smarter we are with regard to waste, the better. Corrugated cardboard and soft plastics are in demand in the recycling market, so our recycling of these provides us with a revenue stream."

Generally speaking, many stores seem to be quite good at processing and recycling their waste. Awareness is increasing and consumer pressure is making a green environmental profile increasingly important. There's a lot still to do, and too many stores continue to rely on a mixed waste container for all their waste. It's high time for change if these stores are to keep up with the competition and not be shunned by their customers. Contact an expert at Orwak and we will help you to improve and streamline your waste management and recycling.