



# Let's talk rubbish

**A**s I continue my mission to become greener, I've started to explore ways to reduce our practice's waste and to recycle more. Zero waste to landfill still seems a long way off but it's certainly an objective for the future. It's worth noting, again, that I'm no expert in this subject. I'm just a small practice owner passionate about the cause, trying to do my bit to protect our environment. Researching for these articles has been particularly helpful. It seems that many of us are on a similar path and have come up with great innovative ideas individually to reduce, reuse and recycle.

In my previous articles, I have covered the greater challenges relating to the optical/eyecare industry waste both we and our industry produce – such as dummy lenses and cases – and I'll discuss this in more detail in the future. For now, I've collated the ideas relating to general practice waste that others have shared with me, along with my research and my own ideas to develop a plan relevant to my own practice. When developing our own waste reduction and recycling policy, I focused on the main waste our practice produces and developed the plan from there. Each of our practices will be different, so in this month's article I will explore some common examples.

## REDUCING WASTE

The biggest way to reduce waste in general is to reduce what we consume and waste in the first place. Being mindful of our personal food wastage seems



*Why not buy your team reusable cups?*



ZERO WASTE SHOPS ARE ON THE RISE

obvious by only buying and preparing what you plan to eat. Sarah King, freelance dispensing optician, suggests reducing fast food container waste by switching our take-out lunches to a packed lunch in reusable containers. We can also easily ditch shop bought bottles of water in favour of refillable bottles and disposable coffee cups in favour of bamboo cups or similar reusable travel cups. You could encourage all staff members to do the same; and maybe even buy some for your colleagues as a gift?

Paper is often one of the easiest consumables to cut back on. Although nervous at the prospect of ditching our trusted paper record, we plan to go paperless in practice for clinical records this year. We've already started using e-GOS via our practice management system and primarily use text and emails instead of letters for recalls and other communications. We've also recently switched to Xero accounts package – and this has reduced our need to print invoices and statements.

In general, we are trying to reduce colour printing and not print unless we absolutely have to. If we do need to print, we use the double-sided option where appropriate. Jean Kelly of Eglinton Eyecare suggests storing manuals and policies online to avoid large documents being printed. We can also reduce the amount of personally addressed junk mail

we receive by registering with the Mailing preference service.

Most suppliers have stopped automatically sending point-of-sale material and we now just order what we need. Although batteries can be recycled, we wouldn't need to do this if we switched to rechargeable batteries – so again this is something to consider. Zero waste shops are popping up all over the country meaning cleaning products can be bought as refills to save generating more packaging waste.

Nick Farrow of Haine and Smith Opticians has recently implemented Project Green. As one of the company's many actions, they have switched over to Hilco's Sea Green solution and offer refills for patients using their refill station. Positive Impact offers a similar eco-friendly refillable lens cleaner solution via its Glasklar system. Although we all like to present glasses nicely at collections, we often assume that our patients want a new case. Maybe we need to change our thinking and ask them?

## REUSING AND REPURPOSING

Before recycling, consider reusing or repurposing first because recycling still uses energy and adds to our carbon emissions. Most of us will already reuse small cardboard boxes and padded envelopes. When we get large boxes from deliveries, we regularly put posts on Facebook to see if anyone needs them for moving. They're normally collected within hours.



Efforts are ongoing to improve plastic recycling

Sheryl Doe from Allegro Optical serves patients Fairtrade tea and coffee in teapots, cups and saucers collected from charity shops. Jean Kelly of Eglinton Eyecare discovered that the plastic sleeves that protect new frames are great for hairdressers to use to cover client's specs when they do hair colouring: genius. Jean also reuses every piece of paper that's blank on one side, such as delivery notes, for scrap before it's shredded and recycled.

Sukie Woodhouse from Woodhouse Opticians makes eco bricks – a plastic bottle stuffed solid with non-biological waste to create a reusable building block. Eco bricks are used to make furniture and even buildings. We can reduce the manufacture of new things by reusing, repairing and buying second-hand, reconditioned or even upcycling items. I've found some amazing upcycled art features on Pinterest using old glasses and sunglasses. My favourite was a light fitting made from old specs.

We must be mindful not to be hypocritical here though. If we are reusing at every opportunity, we shouldn't be surprised when our patients want to do this more too when it comes to their frames. This may not suit our business models and may need some further consideration.

### RECYCLING INSIGHTS

Plastic is historically not biodegradable although there are efforts to improve this. Once all efforts to reduce and reuse have been exhausted, we can try to recycle what's left. Many of us will admit to being confused about what can and cannot be recycled, especially when it comes to plastic. Apparently, there are more than 50 types of plastic around and kerbside collection rules differ with many councils choosing to only recycling plastic bottles.

The plastic recycling process is complex and involves collecting and sorting scrap or waste plastic in order to melt it down and turn it into something else. Most plastics are melted into pellets, which are then used to make denser plastics, such as chairs, kayaks, park benches, playground equipment and decking. Special fleece-like fabrics used in clothes, blankets and more recently lens cloths can be made from recycled plastic bottles.

Business waste and recycling will again vary so if you don't know, it's worth finding out who collects your practice's waste and if they do any recycling collection alongside it. Are you happy with this offering, or should you look at alternatives? Remind the practice team what should and shouldn't be included in mixed recycling. Putting something in the wrong bin or bag can potentially contaminate a whole lorry

load of recycling and can be unpleasant for the people sorting it. Label bins and have a poster in the staff area to show how each item can be recycled.

Our building is rented from the council and we use the council's business waste and recycling collection service. They provide us with orange bags for waste and blue bags for recycling. Unfortunately, they do not collect food waste so we may look at the possibility of composting in the future. Sarah King has done just this, setting up compost in each practice she works in composting teabags and lunch waste.

### AND THE REST...

So, we can now look at what's left. Most of us will now be aware of the Johnson & Johnson Vision Terracycle contact lens recycling scheme collecting the contact lenses themselves as well as the packaging. This scheme has been successfully run by practices across the country including Eglinton Eyecare and Haine and Smith Opticians. Unfortunately, Terracycle seems to want to limit collection points so our practice has been on the waiting list for more than a year. Not to be deterred, we've decided to collect the waste from our patients anyway and hope to drop off to a nearby collection point in bulk every few months.

Terracycle run many similar schemes recycling the traditionally unrecyclable sponsored by the manufacturers and industry. Often these are facilitated by local charities as they can raise funds by collecting. For example, Walkers sponsors the crisp packet recycling and my child's school acts as a local collection point.

The [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com) website has a great tool to help you find your nearest drop-off point for various items. Lightbulbs, batteries, pens, ink cartridges and coffee pods can all be recycled if you know how. That's been a focus of Sarah Thomas from Webb, Lucas & Stubbs – even finding a solution for polystyrene balls and bubble wrap by taking it to the local hospice charity shop to wrap their ornaments.

We've dedicated a unit in our staff area to separate the main things we want to recycle and have produced a waste and recycling policy for our operations manual, so all staff members know the plan. See **Table 1** for a general run-down of recycling options.

I hope this month's article inspires your own 'project green' to reduce waste in your practice. If you have any other ideas, please do get in touch by emailing [apage@abdolondon.org.uk](mailto:apage@abdolondon.org.uk)

**ABI PAGE FBDO is ABDO regional lead for London, and a director of Page & Small Opticians in South East London.**

ITEM	DROP-OFF POINT
Contact lens foil packaging and lenses	Source local drop off point
Pens, markers, highlighters, correction fluid	Via Rymans
Printer cartridges	Via PC World
Batteries	Via supermarkets
Crisp packets	Via Teracycle community collection
Coffee pods	Via Teracycle community collection
Sweet and chocolate wrappers (not Quality Street wrappers as biodegradable)	Via Teracycle community collection
Biscuit/cracker and cake wrappers	Via Teracycle community collection
Energy saving light bulbs	Via PC World
Florescent tubes	Contact council for safe disposal
Clothes and textiles	Via H&M
Bubble wrap and polystyrene balls	Take to local charity shop for wrapping valuables

Table 1. Items to recycle via local drop of schemes