



Access to Garbage is a Real Problem!

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INTRODUCTION

We tend to think of the critical issues in commercial garbage as (1) cost of servicing, (2) cleanliness, and (3) pests and critters. But there are huge challenges associated with unauthorized access to waste, and these challenges are often faced daily by commercial businesses.

So why is access to garbage such a problem? It seems to fall into two main categories: (1) taking garbage out of commercial containers, and (2) putting garbage into commercial containers. Surprisingly, ‘taking garbage out’ can be the bigger problem which we’ll look at below. Putting garbage into commercial containers by people unauthorized to do so fills up the bin faster, resulting in increased waste generation and higher costs for waste disposal (extra pickups, overage charges etc.). Unless the problem becomes overwhelming, the commercial business is frequently willing to accept this problem as a cost of doing business.

DUMPSTER DIVING PROBLEM

“Taking garbage out” of commercial containers can be a challenging and costly problem for commercial businesses to address. The ‘why’s’ of this problem represent a host of social and economic issues, and when the commercial business is located in major cities, the problem increases. Sadly, some people are looking for food waste to eat, and the same people can be looking for fuel to use to light fires at night. Some people are going through the waste hoping to find drugs or products to support an addiction. Another big issue is the ‘end of line’ product search; some stores regularly engage in shelf item reviews and waste disposal of products that are discontinued, have branding changes, or are expired. These latter items are saleable by the dumpster diver and can be taken to flea markets, or even attempted returns to store.

COSTS OF DUMPSTER DIVING

The ‘garbage out’ problem has significant costs and bottom-line impact for the commercial business; they range from daily solid waste management clean-up, staff safety issues, risk of fire if the garbage is used as fuel, risks to the person going through the waste. This problem also creates damage to equipment and to locks and bars used to secure the dumpsters, loss of good neighbor relationships from other commercial businesses wishing the ‘garbage-out business owner’ would just figure out a solution, and negative public

relations that are felt by both the business and its customers. We've seen customers go to great lengths, often futile, to secure their garbage.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

What can be done? Moving your garbage inside may not be the best use of valuable real estate. Re-evaluate the equipment you have and look for equipment that is certified 'bear proof'; bear proof certification is a defined process that ensures black and grizzly bears cannot access food waste, (or break pieces off a container to gain access). Don't mistake bears as being unintelligent; a determined bear is a force to be reckoned with. Another option for volume waste reduction is compaction, which compresses the garbage and removes the value to people accessing your waste. Well-designed disposal systems are specifically made to keep people out for safety certification reasons. Ensure your staff are trained in waste management best practices and retrained when staff change; leaving doors unlocked or open, bags outside the equipment (or worse, hanging out of the equipment) and improper disposal methods must be corrected. Better yet, consider a compactor with an access door that locks after a specified amount of time, removing the need to rely on staff. Put lighting in your waste area, preferably motion sensor lighting. We also recommend that you consider how waste collection equipment is placed; for example, positioning totes so that they provide a good access point in and out of an otherwise secure waste area supports the problem (by providing a jumping in and climbing out point).

If you are a commercial business struggling with these problems, ask for help! The management practices required if this becomes an ongoing problem are far more expensive than the monthly rental on a secure compactor that both delivers a solution that works and doesn't need the "Fort Knox" of waste corrals (Fort Knox corrals are very expensive!) You are in business to provide your product to willing purchasers and consumers, and not to spend every waking moment trying to keep people out of your garbage!!

