

Container Loss Prevention

Reusable transport packaging (Reusables) like reusable plastic containers (RPCs), durable pallets, and reusable pallet wraps are valuable assets that can help reduce operational costs—but only if processes are in place to keep them in the supply chain. While some loss of Reusables due to damage and breakage is usually unavoidable, the following best practices can help keep a maximum number of containers in possession for continuous use.



- ✓ **Label Containers.**
Mark Reusables with “PROPERTY OF” and identify your company name, business logo and contact information. Have containers hot stamped, use durable stickers, or a permanent marker.
- ✓ **Keep an Inventory.**
Track how many Reusables are delivered to each customer or supplier and how many are returned. Follow up promptly when containers go missing. Technology can help with tracking, but for smaller operations, a simple hand-written log can be just as effective.
- ✓ **Communicate with Staff and Customers.**
Think through every step of your Reusables’ journey through the supply chain, and clearly communicate the processes including storing and returning empties. Explain how Reusables differ from limited-use or disposable packaging and their role in your supply chain. Involve staff and customers alike in keeping track of these assets.
- ✓ **Consider a Deposit System.**
Collecting a refundable deposit that covers the cost of lost containers not only incentivizes customers to return them, but also helps pay for replacements when containers do go missing. Using a “debit/credit” system, the outgoing container can be debited to a customer’s balance and credited back once returned.
- ✓ **Preserve Institutional Knowledge.**
When employees turn over or other changes occur, established routines, such as tracking Reusables, are at risk of getting lost or neglected. Establish a process to transfer knowledge, such as a written procedure, and be sure to build it into the onboarding process of new team members.
- ✓ **Offer Rewards.**
Set up an incentive program to motivate suppliers, vendors, and customers to return containers. In retail, customers can be rewarded with a small incentive or allowed to earn points or credit toward a purchase each time a container is returned. This can also help build repeat business.

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Niles Pie Company rewards customers with a free pastry every time they bring in their reusable pie box to make a purchase.



Full Belly Farm used their e-newsletter to explain the benefits of Reusables to customers and ask for help in returning the boxes.



Fiddlehead Farm had their Reusable Plastic Containers prominently hot-stamped to help track and return them.



A concrete manufacturer charges customers a deposit for their durable pallets, credited back once the reusable pallets are returned.

Use Reusables is a program of Alameda County public agency [StopWaste](https://www.stopwaste.org/), aimed at helping businesses replace limited-use transport packaging materials like cardboard boxes and plastic stretch film with durable, reusable alternatives. Use Reusables offers grant funding, vendor referrals and one-on-one technical assistance. For more information including case studies visit www.UseReusables.org.