



## Orange County Sheriff's Department's Theo Lacy Facility

**About:** As the largest of Orange County's five jails, the Theo Lacy Facility houses an average of 3,100 inmates. At its peak, TLF landfilled more than 1,400 tons of waste per year at a total cost of \$67,000. Through the creation of a Sustainability Unit in 2013, the facility was able to lower its waste hauling bills and create additional revenue by recycling materials that previously would have been discarded.



*Theo Lacy Facility in Orange, California*

**Innovation:** In an effort to reduce costs and exceed the goals outlined in [California's 75 Percent Initiative](#), the Orange County Sheriff's Department created a Sustainability Unit to revamp TLF's waste management and recycling strategies.



*Food waste recycling program*

**Reduce:** TLF donates an average of 100 meals a day to the Orange County Food Bank. All leftover food waste from the facility's kitchen is composted by TLF's waste hauler. The program resulted in a reduction of 260 tons of food waste per year.

The Sustainability Unity was also able to reduce waste and costs by changing the type of footwear the inmates use. Previously, Theo Lacy issued rubber sandals that broke down very quickly; the facility went through approximately 16,000 pairs in 2014, comprising about 8 tons of its waste stream. In early 2015, TLF switched to a uni-foot sandal, which can be worn on either foot. Therefore, when one sandal breaks, only that sandal needs to be replaced rather than the pair. This resulted in a dramatic reduction in waste. The new footwear is also made of a stronger material that lasts longer, saving the facility additional money each year.

**Reuse:** When clothing and other textiles at TLF are exchanged, each damaged item is inspected to see if it can be repaired or repurposed. The items that can't be fixed are sent to a recycler. Sustainability deputies also created the "Jails to Tails" program that turns discarded inmate sheets and clothing into dog beds for Orange County Animal Care. TLF also worked with Carden Academy, a Huntington Beach school, to collect candy wrappers to send in to Terracycle, a company that pays 2 cents per wrapper to schools that participate in the program.



*Deputy William Wagner, creator of "Jails to Tails" program*



*Theo Lacy Facility recycles 2.2 million tons of milk cartons each year*

**Recycle:** The TLF Sustainability Program used inmate labor to sort out cardboard (80 tons per year), metal food cans (86,000 per year), milk cartons (2.2 million per year), brown paper bags (1.3 million per year), newspapers (48,000 per year), and polystyrene food trays (200,000 per year) to reduce waste hauling costs. TLF later decided to replace many polystyrene food trays for plastic trays that could be washed and reused. All polystyrene used for meals is returned and recycled into products like picture frames and crown molding.

Recycled Material	New Revenue
Cardboard	\$11,000 per year
Metal Food Cans	\$3,000 per year
Other Paper Products	\$1,000 per year
Textiles	\$3,000 per year

**Cost Savings:** In 2011, TLF had a 0 percent recycling rate and paid \$67,000 to a waste hauler. After the sustainability program was implemented in 2013, TLF raised its average recycling rate to 65 percent and lowered its waste hauling expense to just \$17,000 a year. In addition to cost savings, the Sustainability Unit saw an opportunity to create additional revenue by recycling formerly discarded materials

- **\$50,000 yearly savings** on hauling
- **\$18,000 yearly revenue** from recycling

**Key to Success:** Theo Lacy credits the dedication of its deputies and the support of management for the quick success of its sustainability program.



Theo Lacy Facility teams up with the Salvation Army to donate surplus food

“Deputies assigned to the sustainability unit were given time to reach out to other successful recycling programs ... (like) Petco Park, Sea World, U.S. Zero Waste Council, Waste Management, Disneyland, Chapman University, Loyola Marymount University and many others,” said Orange County Deputy Bill Wagner. “They visited these sites and researched what would work in a jail setting.” Deputy Wagner also stressed the importance of Theo Lacy’s commitment to change, saying “the deputies assigned to the Sustainability Unit had full support from their superiors to make a significant change in the way waste was disposed of at the facility. Through trial and error and the programs that were put in place, Theo Lacy was able to make drastic changes in a very short amount of time.”

**Positive Press:** The Theo Lacy Facility’s groundbreaking sustainability program has generated media interest and positive press coverage. The *Orange County Register* featured stories about TLF’s [candy wrapper](#) and [dog bed](#) programs. The *Huntington Beach Independent* also covered the [candy wrapper](#) program. The overall sustainability program was the subject of stories in *California Sheriff Magazine* and Chapman University’s cable news network.