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Challenge or Opportunity: Often when I suggest that a client should explore opportunities to promote pollution prevention I receive blank stares and tepid smiles because most people have no idea where to begin or what it means. In basic terms pollution prevention corresponds to improving resource management in order to reduce the amount of material wasted or lost. The best way to explain a concept and promote change is to give an example. So I use improved inventory management as my starting point because it is a quick way to achieve results and save money which builds interest.

Approach or Solution: Prepare and maintain a chemical inventory for your facility. Know what you have. Use what you have before purchasing additional stock. Learn to share resources within your facility. More than 35% of the materials disposed of as hazardous waste in the United States are obsolete, excess and often unopened materials. Simply put - overstocked items. These facilities paid for materials that sat on the shelf unused and then paid more to dispose of these materials. Immediate cost savings can be achieved by developing and maintaining a computerized inventory of what you have in stock. This strategy can help you identify what you have on hand, and to avoid purchasing excess material. You can also use your records to identify products that are nearing their expiration date and need to be used first.

Tips to get you started:

1. When preparing your inventory, make each department responsible for preparing and maintaining their inventory. Use a team approach to make the task more manageable.
2. Create a single comprehensive inventory for the facility. Designate someone as the gatekeeper responsible for collecting input from the various departments within your organization.

3. Track material usage and expiration dates. Consider eliminating materials that are not used. Promote the sharing of resources to avoid repetitive overstocking. Promote the use of older materials first to avoid the need to dispose of expired materials.

4. Do not buy in bulk. This leads to overstocking and will cost more in the long run because hazardous waste disposal typically costs more than the purchase of new product.

Impact: Is the effort worth it? Look at your annual hazardous waste disposal bill. For a gross estimate, subtract 35% from the bill. That could be a sizeable incentive for a mid to large size generator of hazardous waste. You can also reap additional savings by needing to purchase fewer materials. By reducing the size of your inventory, you may also lower your regulatory and permitting requirements, improve site safety and decrease the need to handle and store as much hazardous materials. These are all positive outcomes that can benefit your facility.