

# CASE STUDY: Subway



## BUSINESS PROFILE

**Name:** Subway  
**Business Type:** Deli Sandwiches  
**Location:** Stores #49822, #27048, #30816, #32950, #30524, #13219, #49111, #48043, #25615, #2861, #4133  
**Average On-site Dining Seats:** 20  
**Take-out:** Yes  
**Warewashing:** No mechanized dishwashing  
**Average Employees:** 7

Eleven Subway stores participated in Clean Water Action's ReThink Disposable program in the cities of Palo Alto, Alameda, and Fremont, California. Subway is a franchised chain with numerous locations throughout the world and the San Francisco Bay Area.

## Packaging Practices prior to ReThink Disposable:

- Single-Use Plastic Cups Used for Water
- Single-Use Plastic Utensils Individually Wrapped in Plastic\*

*\*plastic utensil wrapping differs by location*

## Recommendations Implemented:

- Reusable Cups for Water
- Silverware for Dine-In



As a result of implementing **ReThink Disposable's** recommended practices, the 11 Subway restaurants are collectively preventing the use of **305,125** items and **4,367** pounds of waste annually, while earning an ongoing net cost savings of **\$7,458** each year from the avoided disposable foodware purchases. Clean Water Action tracked and quantified the data from five of the 11 locations to establish a per-store average reduction from transitioning to reusable water cups and silverware for dine-in customers.

Individual Subway stores invested between \$120 to \$300 to purchase reusable cups for water (about four dozen) and silverware sets (about two dozen forks, knives, and spoons) for customers who need utensils while dining in.

As a franchise, Subway's existing practice to use reusable sandwich baskets reduces waste by eliminating the need for additional sandwich wrap or

disposable plates. **ReThink Disposable** recommends that Subway implement our recommendations to further reduce packaging and waste by replacing disposable water cups and utensils with reusable foodware at every store.

A common concern when implementing the use of reusable cups and silverware is that the stores will suffer too much loss of product. However, with proper signage and training, Subway stores can mitigate loss and reduce the need to replace product. The stores that participated in **ReThink Disposable** reported no significant loss of product. Some loss is to be expected in any food operation with reusable ware, and after the ongoing cost of restocking cups and silverware was considered, all the locations showed an annual net cost savings.



*Disposable Cups and Utensils Before Changes*



*Reusable Cup and Silverware After Changes*

**For every dollar invested in reusable foodware items, the average Subway location will reduce 2.5 pounds of waste, preventing the use of 172 single-use disposable items.**

## Results by Location:

Subway Store #	Payback Period (months)	Annual Quantity of Single-Use Items Prevented (# of pieces)	Annual Net Savings (after payback period)	Annual Waste Reduction (lbs.)
49822	3	18,250	\$546	279
27048	3	18,250	\$546	279
30816	3	18,250	\$546	279
32950	3	18,250	\$546	279
30524	2	63,875	\$870	870
<b>Store Average</b>	<b>2.8 months</b>	<b>27,375</b>	<b>\$678</b>	<b>397 lbs.</b>

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- \$7,458 in total annual net cost savings
- 301,125 disposable items reduced per year
- 4,367 pounds of annual waste reduction

*\*Projected impacts based on data collected from five Subway locations*



**Amos Wu, Owner:** “Customers are very happy with the changes, I’m reducing waste, and saving money!”

ReThink Disposable is a program of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund conducted in partnership with local businesses and government agencies. Generous support is provided by a changing list of public and private funders. To learn more about the program, its partners, and funders, visit: [www.rethinkdisposable.org](http://www.rethinkdisposable.org).



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