

What's in Your Waste?

Steps for organizing a waste audit

Why do a waste audit?

A waste audit is a way to see what your school's garbage is made up of so that you can make a plan for reducing, reusing and recycling. It seems like a yucky, dirty task, but believe it or not, kids and adults usually have fun with it. The results of a waste audit can help your school determine what areas need work and how best to start your waste reduction program. (As a bonus, you can use the data you collect for real-world math lessons on weight and volume and creating graphs and charts.)

The best time to do a waste audit is at the beginning of the school year or before you make changes to your program. Do another waste audit a month or so after making changes and at the end of the school year to chart your progress. This will get your school on its way to becoming an Oregon Green School!



The basic plan

Step 1 – Form a recycling/earth team to coordinate waste sort and recycling efforts at your school.

Step 2 – Conduct an audit of school waste. Choose to sort waste from the whole school, the cafeteria, classrooms, office or staff room.

Step 3 – Evaluate the results. Use the waste audit form to record your findings, calculate percentages and create graphs or charts of the schools waste. Use this information to create a waste reduction plan for your school.

Step 4 – Present the audit results and the waste reduction plan to your principal and rest of the school.

Step 5 – Put your plan into action! Be sure to provide plenty of training for new procedures and promote the new program with signs, announcements and in the school newsletter.

Conducting the waste audit

Time: Approximately one hour, with 5-10 students

Equipment needed: Rubber gloves, large tarp or plastic drop cloth, extra garbage bags, scale, several five-gallon buckets, waste category signs, and waste audit forms

Before the audit: Obtain permission to conduct the audit in the cafeteria, gym, or in a covered area outdoors and work with your custodian to save or collect cafeteria and/or classroom and office garbage from previous day.

Safety considerations: Please do not sort bathroom or health room waste. Wear closed-toe shoes.

The audit:

1. Using the waste audit form, record where the waste was collected from. (classrooms, cafeteria, etc.)
2. Put on gloves and estimate the total volume and weight of the waste to be audited. Record on form.
Weight: Weigh the unopened bags of garbage. (with a bathroom-type scale, have a student hold the bag while standing on the scale, then subtract the student's weight)
Volume: Compare volume to the 5-gallon buckets
3. Empty the contents of the bag on tarp and sort into waste categories listed on the form.
4. Record the weight and estimate the volume for each of the categories.
Weight: put in buckets and weigh, subtract weight of bucket.
Volume: estimate volume by measuring how much of the bucket is full
5. Make notes about items that you find a lot of in the trash – types of food, pop cans, etc., or other interesting things you observe.
6. Clean up!
Return non-recyclables to garbage cans and sort recyclables into recycling bins
Wash tarp and buckets, sweep floor

Post-audit activities

1. Complete calculations on the waste audit form. Use these numbers to chart or graph your school's waste by weight and volume.
2. Create a plan to reduce waste based on your findings. Questions to think about:
 - What were the main components of the school's waste?
 - Would the results be different if the sort was done at a different time in the school year?
 - What were some of the items that could have been reused instead of thrown away?
 - How could students reduce how much was thrown away of some of the items?
3. Share the results and the plan with the rest of the school.
4. Put your plan into action!

**For further assistance or to borrow equipment, contact your local
Oregon Green School coordinator**