

School Waste Audit

Overview

A waste audit is a process of collecting and measuring the waste generated at school. Results can be used to develop a waste reduction and recycling action plan.

Objectives

- Identify which areas of the school generate waste and what types of waste are produced.
- Collect and classify different waste streams.
- Accurately measure and record findings.
- Develop an action plan to reduce, reuse and recycle as much of the school's waste as possible.
- Monitor and evaluate the success of initiatives by carrying out a follow up audit.

Preparation

- Identify a typical school day on which you will audit the school's waste and inform staff when it will take place.
- Ask the cleaner/caretaker to arrange for the collection of one day's general waste from the entire school. Classrooms, staff rooms, offices and play areas should be included. Bags should be labelled to show where the waste came from and whether it contains mixed waste or recycling. Store bags safely overnight.
- Ask catering/kitchen staff to bin food waste separately as these bags will be weighed and not sorted.

Materials

- Bags of labelled waste
- Ground sheets/floor covers
- Residual/recycling bin bags
- Smaller bags for sorted waste
- Disposable gloves
- Litter pickers
- Map of school site
- Aprons
- Weighing equipment, e.g. spring balance
- Waste audit recording sheets
- Clipboards
- Pencils

Waste audit

1. Ask pupils if there is anything they expect to find during the audit. Some questions to consider:
 - What types of general waste do they expect to find?
 - How much recycling do they think will be in the general waste bins?
 - From what areas do they expect to find more recyclable items?
2. Explain health and safety measures to pupils:
 - Gloves must be worn. Litter pickers will be available for heavily contaminated waste.
 - Avoid touching your face with the gloves on.
 - Wear an apron to protect clothes (if available).
 - Tell an adult if you spot anything sharp.
 - Wash hands thoroughly afterwards.
3. Weigh bagged food waste and record the findings. Dispose of the waste in the usual food waste bin.

4. Divide the group into teams of 3-4 pupils. Give each team a ground sheet, clipboard, recording sheet and pencil, a set of weighing scales and carrier bag, one litter picker and a pair of gloves for each pupil.
5. Each team chooses a bag of waste and marks where it comes from on the shared school map (displayed centrally for pupils to add to).
6. Empty the bagged waste onto the groundsheet and organise into the different types of waste shown on the recording sheet. Make a note of what 'other' items are.
7. Take one type of waste at a time and place it in the carrier bag. Weigh it and record the weight in grams/kilos. Tip the waste into the larger bin bags (shared with the whole group) and reuse the carrier bag for the next type of waste.
8. When the bagged waste has been sorted and the findings recorded, dispose of the rubbish and recycling in the usual way. Ground sheets and litter pickers should be sanitised where possible, and hands washed thoroughly.

Results analysis*

Use the data recorded to calculate the daily, weekly and annual waste totals for the whole school:

- Add together each team's findings to calculate the school's daily total.
- Multiply daily total by five for the weekly result and by 38 (average term weeks) for the yearly result.
- Work out the percentage of different types of waste produced.
- Compare waste data from different areas around the school.
- Identify areas where waste is at its highest or lowest levels.
- Identify areas where recycling may be ending up in the general waste bins.

*These activities are dependent on the pupils' ability and may need to be completed in a follow-up session.

Discussion

Ask pupils to share their observations from the audit. Questions to consider:

- What were the most common types of waste?
- Did they find any recycling in the general waste bins?
- Which area produced the most waste?
- Is there any type of waste that could be reduced?
- Is anything currently being thrown away that is recyclable?

Follow-up

- How will results be shared with other pupils, staff and parents?
- Use findings to develop the school's waste minimisation action plan to reduce, reuse and recycle. See our *Schools Waste Management Toolbox* for suggestions of initiatives.
- Repeat the audit to see if initiatives are effective and whether there are areas that require further intervention.

Action plan example:

Target (what you want to achieve)	Action (what you need to do to meet the target)	Success criteria (how will you know if you've met the target)	Resources (who will help and what materials are needed)	Time frame (when the target needs to be achieved by)
All pupils and staff recycle paper.	Recycling bins in classrooms, offices and staff areas. Clear signs on bins. Reminder posters displayed in these areas.	No paper in general waste bins.	Eco team to design and display labels and posters. Office manager will order new bins. Caretaker will distribute bins. Cleaners will inform staff if paper is repeatedly found in general waste bins.	End of spring term (3 months).

Waste Audit Record Sheet

Team members					
Date of audit					
	Area of school				
	Mixed general waste (M) or recycling (R)				
Type of waste	Weight (grams/kilos)				
Paper					
Newspaper/magazines					
Cardboard					
Wrappers (e.g. biscuits, crisps)					
Plastic bottle					
Plastic food container (e.g. yoghurt pot)					
Metal (e.g. can, tin, foil)					
Glass					
Carton (e.g. drink)					
Food (e.g. fruit skin)					
Tissues/paper towels					
Stationery (e.g. pens, pencils)					
Other					