



# What's in Your Waste?

## The basic plan

**Step 1** – Form a team to coordinate the waste audit.

**Step 2** – Choose to sort the waste from the whole school, the cafeteria, and classrooms, office or staff room.

**Step 3** – Use the waste audit form to record your findings, calculate percentages and create graphs or charts of the school's 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.



## 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 (download from website)
- waste audit forms (download from website)

Before the audit: Obtain permission to conduct the audit in the cafeteria, gym, or in a covered area outdoors. 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. Use 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 both as:



**Weight:** Weigh the unopened bags of garbage. (With a bathroom-type scale, have a student hold the bag while standing on the scale, and then subtract the student's weight)

**Volume:** Estimate the volume, by comparing volume to the 5-gallon buckets

3. Empty the contents of the bag (s) on tarp and sort into buckets by waste categories listed on the "Waste Audit Form".

4. Record the weight and estimated 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 in the trash – types of food, soda 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!

## How do you “weigh in” compared to the average school?

Recyclable paper –	28%	Garden materials –	3%
Food waste –	24%	Recyclable plastics –	1%
Milk cartons –	4%	Hazardous waste –	1%
Recyclable metal –	3%	Polystyrene –	<1%
Recyclable glass –	3%	All other wastes –	32%

*(EPA 1993 Education Waste characterization Study)*

## Handy Conversions

<u>1 cubic yard of:</u>	<u>(average)</u>
uncompacted but flattened cardboard =	100 lbs.
office paper =	600 lbs.
aluminum cans =	65 lbs.
mixed plastic bottles =	32 lbs.
glass bottles and jars =	600 lbs.
food waste =	850 lbs.
1 Kilogram =	2.205 pounds
1 cubic yard =	27 cubic feet