

Carry out a waste audit in school

You will need

- Bagged rubbish collected from your school
- Ground sheet or floor covers
- Old carrier bags (one for each type of waste)
- Large bin bags
- Spring balances
- Clipboard and recording sheets
- Protective gloves (one pair per person)
- Aprons or old clothing

Preparation

1. Choose an 'average' school day to carry out your waste audit (for example, do not carry out your audit during events, end of term clear out or when groups are out of schools). Make sure that the whole school knows when the audit will be carried out.
2. Carry out a risk assessment for the activity.
3. You may want to send a letter home to parents to inform them about the activity. Ask them to provide suitable clothing for the pupils. Also, let them know the purpose of the activity.
4. Ask the caretaker to save one day's waste from the entire school and label up the waste with where it came from (for example 'Classroom 1' or 'Playground'). Store the waste overnight. **Please note** You can do this activities for specific areas depending on the aim of the audit. For example, only look at the waste in the hall / kitchen bins to monitor lunchtime waste.

The audit

1. Explain the health and safety issue with the pupils. This includes making sure that everyone is wearing suitable gloves before touching any waste and informing an adult if they find anything sharp or dangerous.
2. Divide the class into three or four groups (depending on the size of the class). Each group should have a ground sheet to work around, a recording sheet and pencil, a set of spring balances, plastic carrier bags (one for each type of waste) and large carrier bags (ideally one for each type of waste; this will allow you to recycle your waste (if you have the facilities) when you're done). Each pupil should be wearing protective gloves.
3. Each group should empty the contents of one bag of rubbish at a time onto the plastic mat and sort it into the different types of waste putting the waste into its relevant carrier bag. Each time the carrier bag is full,

weigh the contents and record the type of waste (plastic, metal, paper etc) and where it has come from. Empty the contents of the carrier bag into it's relevant large bin bag and reuse the carrier bag on the next batch of waste until all the waste has been sorted.

4. Dispose of the waste and recyclables in the usual manner. Ensure all pupils wash their hands thoroughly.

What to do with your findings

1. You can use the findings from the audit to calculate the daily, weekly and annual waste totals for the whole school. To find out the weekly total multiply by 5, or to find out the annual total multiply by 38 (the average number of weeks spent in school).
2. Work out the percentages for each type of waste. You can use this to determine waste 'hot-spots' - areas where the most amount of waste is produced.
3. Discuss your findings. What are the most common types of waste? Is any of it recyclable? Can the waste be reduced in any areas?
4. Use your finding to put together an 'Action Plan' of how waste can be reduced in your school. This can focus on one particular area or the whole school.
5. Share the findings and the Action Plan with the rest of the school including school staff. You could do this during school assembly, notices around school or your school newsletter.

Follow up audit

It may be a good idea to carry out a follow up audit to see if the Action Plan is proving to be successful or not. This will also show where waste minimisation can be improved.

A simpler version

This avoids the need for sorting the waste by hand. At the end of the school day (when the bins have been emptied) attach a recording sheet to each bin along with a pencil, ready for the next day.

On the recording sheet, draw a table to show different types of waste. For example a can of pop, crisp packet, paper, food etc, or it could be more generic, such as glass, metal, plastic, food, paper (depending on the age of the pupils). Leave space at the side of each image for the pupils / staff to tally. Also, be sure to write the location of the bin on the recording sheet.