



Why do a waste audit investigation?

A waste audit can help identify the types and quantities of waste produced in a particular waste stream. By doing a waste audit and becoming a garbologist (a person who studies garbage) we can make a real-time assessment of sorting and waste behavior on campus. We can answer questions like how much of our waste stream could have been recycled or composted or what are we not seeing in our waste stream that is a cause for celebration?

By understanding your waste stream, you can identify opportunities and develop strategies to educate your peers and reduce waste

This guide outlines the general steps for setting up and leading a waste audit on campus.

Step 1. Form Your Team

Before setting out to do a waste audit, it's important for key school staff to be informed and kept in the loop. They may even be able to support your planning efforts. Key staff may include:

- Your principal or vice principal
- Key teachers like club advisors
- The custodial team

You may also seek out other students that would be interested in joining you. Look for an environmental club on campus or a science, environmental, or highly motivated teacher(s).

what is a waste stream?

A waste stream refers to the flow of wasted material from its source to its final disposal destination



Step 2. Assess and Plan



Think about what happens every day at school—what types of materials do students, teachers, and staff bring on campus? What do you notice about material that gets discarded in the waste stream? Before doing a waste audit, it's important to assess your school campus to learn how wasted material flows and where there is access to sorting bins.

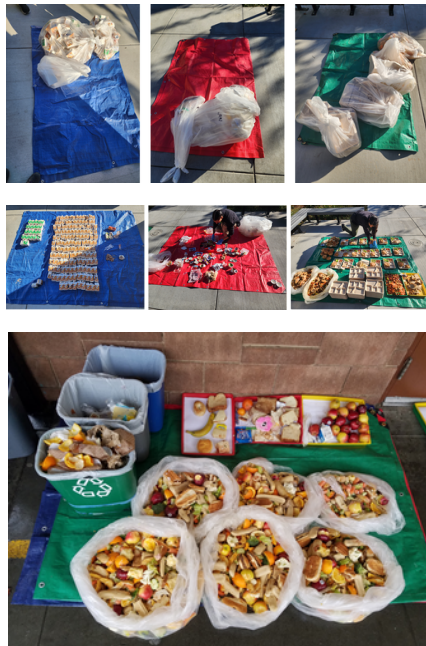
It may be helpful to observe a lunch or break period to see how students and staff are using sorting bins. Are bins accessible? Are there any stand-alone garbage bins? Is signage clear? All of this can provide insight to your finding once you collect waste audit data.

Step 3. Gather Materials and Waste Samples

Safety is of the utmost importance when doing a waste audit. For personal protection, all participants should wear **gloves**, **goggles**, **aprons** and **facemasks**.

For the audit, StopWaste recommends **colored tarps, bins**, and **trays** to distinguish each waste stream sample. **Bags** are used to sort the waste and a **hanging scale** or **floor scale** is used to weigh the material.

Work with your custodial team to gather at least **25 lb samples** from each of the waste streams on campus - recycle, compost, and garbage. You can pull from dumpsters or pull bags directly from the bins in your target location(s) (i.e. from the cafeteria, hallways, courtyards, etc.).



Step 4. Conduct the Audit

With your materials in hand, find a location that's suitable for your audit. Layout your tarps, trays, and samples. Sort each waste stream on the appropriate colored tarp (**red** for **garbage stream** sample, **blue** for **recycle stream** sample, and **green** for **compost stream** sample). Sort materials into the following categories:

- Landfill
- Recyclables
- Compost - Edible Food
- Compost - Sealed and Unbitten Food from the school meal program
- Compost - Inedible compostables like peels, paper, and bones

Weigh each category and log it on a data sheet. If also collecting volume data, put each category of materials in a bin and note the volume (length x width x height of materials in the bin).



Step 5. Analyze, Report and Celebrate!

A picture is worth a thousand words! In addition to gathering quantitative data, photos can really show your community exactly what's in the waste stream. Create a final report of your findings, including your recommendations for reducing waste and any celebrations of successful sorting and waste reduction!



Download resources and materials for each step online:
www.StopWaste.org/WasteAudit