Organic Waste Smart Schools

Waste and recycling audit guide

Schools produce a large amount of waste that could be recycled or composted. This waste and recycling audit guide will help you to conduct a school waste audit. The results of the audit can be used to develop waste reduction strategies for different waste types at your school.

You are not required to complete a waste audit prior to applying for the Organic Waste Smart Schools Program.

Why conduct a school waste audit?
Waste audits help identify how much and what type of waste your school produces. The information you collect can help you evaluate your waste and resource recovery practices and understand where best to direct your efforts. It is a good idea to conduct a waste audit prior to starting your project to give you a baseline and make it easy to measure your impact.

What's involved in a school waste audit?
During an audit, students sort and classify school waste according to type then measure and record their results. Students then analyse this data to identify problem wastes or behaviours and to identify solutions to school waste issues.

Getting started

When: Audits should be conducted in the late afternoon, to allow a full day's worth of waste to be collected. This will provide you with the best idea of your school's waste profile.

Where: In an undercover, well-ventilated and easy to clean space that is protected from the wind. Undercover areas or multipurpose centres provide the ideal venue for waste audits.

Tools : Aprons, gloves, safety glasses, tongs or grabbers, large rubbish bags, tarpaulins or painters drop sheets, rakes and/or brooms, scales (must be able to measure in 0.1kg increments between 100g and 20kg), clip boards and pens for recording.

Other considerations: Schools should notify parents of the activity. A template letter to parents is provided to notify parents of the audit.

Conducting your waste audit

1. **Collect the waste**
   To get an idea of your school's waste profile, you will need to collect one day's worth of school waste. You can collect waste from different locations around the school, including:
   - the playground and sports fields (general waste and recycling)
   - classrooms and the library (general waste and recycling)
   - canteen and/or dining room (general waste, organics and recycling)
   - staffroom (general waste and recycling).

   When collecting the waste make sure you label where it has come from. This will help you to identify problem waste 'hotspots'.

2. **Sort the waste**
   Waste is typically sorted into type of waste and location. In conducting a simple audit schools may sort their waste into three distinct waste types – organics, recyclables, and non-recyclables. You can download the measuring and recording table template that uses these categories and breaks them down into sub-categories. You can adjust this template to best suit your project.

3. **Measure and record the waste**
   Students can now measure the weight of each waste type at each location. Put each waste type into a separate garbage bag or bucket and weigh it using a scale. Record the weight of each waste type in the Measuring and Recording Table. Now calculate the total weight of the waste collected.

4. **Analyse your data**
   The data collected will give students a valuable insight into the school's waste habits and help inform the school's targeted solutions. Use this formula to calculate the percentage of each waste type that fills the school bins.

$$\frac{\text{Waste type (e.g. food waste) in Kg}}{\text{Total waste in Kg}} \times 100 = \text{Percentage of total school waste}$$

   This will help students identify problem waste and waste hotspots. To help students analyse the data, consider the following questions:
   1. Where was the most waste generated?
   2. What is the most common type of waste in each area e.g. playground, classroom, staffroom?
   3. How might you reduce waste in each of these areas?
   4. Were there any contaminates (non-recyclable material) in the recycling bins, and if so, what were they?
   5. Was there any recyclable material (e.g. clean paper, cans) in general waste bins? If so, what were they?
   6. What might prevent people from correctly disposing of their waste/recycling at your school?
   7. What strategies could be used to improve waste and recycling rates at your school?

   Use this information to develop a plan that reduces overall school waste.

What's next?

Your school's waste audit should provide you with a lot of information about where your school could direct its waste mitigation efforts. This can be used to validate the project in your grant application under the Organic Waste Smart Schools Program
https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/pollution/management/waste/recovery/funding-grants

You may also want to use the learnings in your classroom to help students understand the value of recycled materials and the impact waste can have on the environment.