

HOW TO COMPLETE A WASTE AUDIT

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Rubber gloves
- Scale for weighing contents
- Containers or bins to put the sorted waste into
- Notebook and pen for recording details
- Tape and Marker (Or some other way of labeling bags)
- All of your collected waste bagged and labeled over three to five days
- Tarp and area to lay it out

STEP ONE – PLAN YOUR TEAM AND TIMEFRAME

It is important that all the appropriate people on your team are aware of the waste audit and when it will be conducted.

Do you have someone who coordinates with your waste collection services? Make sure that you don't overlap your audit with trash pick-up day.

Do you have a health and safety team? Make sure that they are aware of the audit – they may have input on company-specific safety procedures for such an undertaking.

Do you have a custodial team? They should be alerted to the upcoming audit and can be integral in the planning process. They can help by collecting all of the waste in your office, labeling it, and then storing it in a designated area to prepare for the audit.

Do you have a Sustainability Coordinator or someone in a similar role? While you might be conducting this audit in order to save money for the company through proper disposal – this could be a great opportunity to determine where the company could be expanding their recycling and composting efforts. Be sure to pull them into the process so that you don't miss out on any opportunities for change or growth.

When is the best time to conduct the audit?

Tuesday through Thursday is often considered the most optimal timeframe to complete a waste audit. This is because the middle of the week is the most representative of everyone in the office contributing to the waste, since people most often take-off work on either Monday or Friday.

You can conduct the audit for the entire week, but this may mean that someone has to stay late on Friday to do all of the data recording, or it will need to sit over the weekend until the next work week. Do whatever works best for your circumstances, but we recommend the Tuesday-Thursday approach.

STEP TWO – COLLECTION

Identify all of the places where waste is disposed of in your office and create a label for each area.

For example, your labels might look like this for the first day:

- Downstairs Bathroom – 11/27/2018
- Upstairs Women’s Bathroom – 11/27/2018
- Kitchen Trash – 11/27/2018
- Kitchen Recycling – 11/27/2018
- Kitchen Compost – 11/27/2018
- Kitchen Upcycling Container – 11/27/2018
- Questionable Waste Bin* – 11/27/2018

*In our office, a questionable waste bin may include such items as batteries, lightbulbs, toner cartridges, pens, pencils, chemicals, packing materials, etc. Our Sustainability Coordinator then sorts this waste and disposes of it in the proper manner. Be sure to add whatever special categories you may need for your type of business.

Prepare marked bins that identify the different categories you want to sort.

Your bins may be labeled something like this: General Waste, Plastic, Paper, Metals, Food, Packing Materials, Electronics, Food Packaging, Disposable cups/containers/utensils, etc.

Determine where the waste will be stored until Sorting Day arrives.

Do you have an area that you already use for waste collection? If so, great! Lay out a large tarp in this area and start collecting the bags there until you are ready for sorting. Make sure that you have a conversation with the relevant people in your office to ensure that you aren’t creating a health hazard with where you store the waste.

STEP THREE – SORTING

It’s time to start digging! Make sure that you use your gloves and whatever protective gear has been recommended to you by your team, and start going through each bag and sorting the contents into the bins. Be sure to do this one bag at a time and weigh the contents for each category, subtracting the weight of the bin each time. Also, take note of any waste that was disposed of improperly, you may find patterns.

Mark each waste source's total weight for each category into your notebook. For example, your breakdown for one waste source may look like this:

Kitchen Trash

- Plastic – 1 lb.
- Paper – 2.5 lbs.
- Metals - .75 lbs.
- *Etc.*

STEP FOUR – HOW DO YOU MEASURE UP?

Now that you have calculated and recorded the totals for all of your waste sources and the different categories you selected, it's time to do some math.

If you did the three-day audit, take your totals and divide them by three – this will give you the daily average over the three days. Then take this number and multiply it by the number of average days you are open each year. You can repeat this for each waste source, category, or overall totals as needed.

If you did the full week audit, take your totals and multiply each categories weight by the number of weeks you are open on average each year. You can repeat this for each waste source, category, or overall totals as needed.

STEP FIVE – THE FOLLOW-UP

You did it! You now have an overview of the types of waste you are generating, how much you are generating on average and items that are often disposed of improperly. Now do something with it!

Maybe you've identified that you dispose of a lot of cardboard but haven't been recycling it properly. Reach out to your local recycling company to get special bins for your corrugated cardboard or even call a local composting service – they often accept pizza boxes and uncoated corrugate.

Did you find a lot of hazardous waste or electronics in your audit? Look into mail-in services in your area that can accept these kinds of waste or find out where you can drop them off in your area.

Maybe you can now identify ways to give some of your waste a second life. Paper can be shredded and used as packing materials, used paper can be stapled together and used as notepads, CDs can be used as coasters or art, packing peanuts can be reused in outgoing shipments – use your imagination!

RESOURCES

Here are the resources that Tech Networks uses for their sustainable waste program:

- Upcycling and recycling of just about anything: [TerraCycle](#)
- Organic waste, compostable items, and corrugated cardboard: [Bootstrap Compost](#)
 - Mention us when you set up service, we love them!

- General recycling and electronic waste: [Save That Stuff](#)
- Random household items from employees (keyboards, vacuums, hair dryers): [Best Buy](#)

More Questions? Need Help?

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