

Top tips to reduce waste in schools

October 2009



Primary and secondary schools in England throw away the equivalent weight of 185 double decker buses of waste every school day. That is 258,300 tonnes of waste in a year arising from the whole education sector!

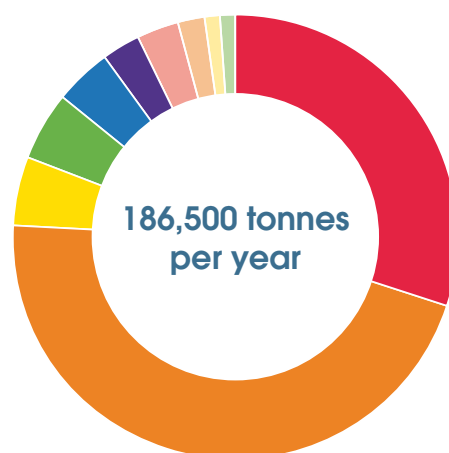
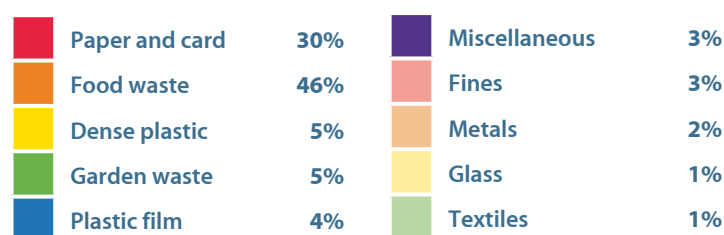
The vast majority of day-to-day waste can easily be avoided if schools make a concerted effort to reduce, reuse and recycle when they can. If schools cut down the amount of waste they create they can save money, and reduce their burden on the environment.

A lot of rubbish ends up in landfill sites, meaning we lose valuable resources. A can made from recycled aluminium requires five per cent of the energy to produce compared with one made from new, since it avoids the energy intensive stages of mining and extraction. Examples like this show how recycling helps to tackle climate change.

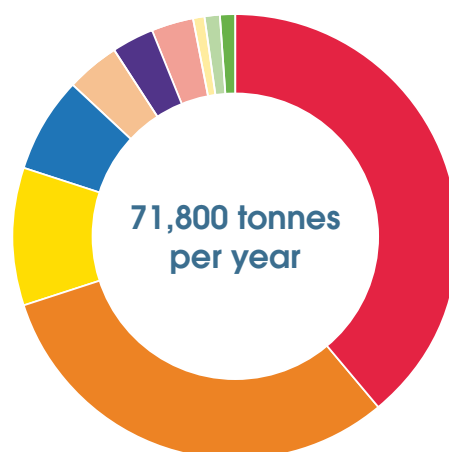
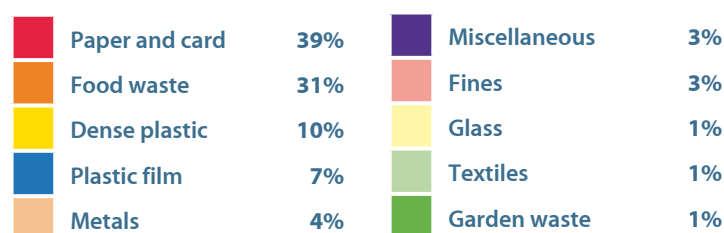
Waste produced by primary and secondary schools

Source: Report into the nature and scale of waste produced by schools in England, WRAP (2008). www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/Report_into_the_Nature_and_Scale_of_Waste_produced_by_schools_in_England.6b49fc0b.5723.pdf

Primary



Secondary



1

Try to stop producing waste in the first place!

The best way to manage our waste is not to produce it in the first place! Cutting down on throw-away products and buying only what we need prevents unnecessary waste. Reducing your waste is much better option environmentally and financially than recycling or any other waste disposal. If your rubbish is collected by your local council your school may be charged according to the amount collected (though you should not be charged for disposal). If you reduce the amount of waste your school produces, you will reduce its costs too.

- Work with students to carry out a school waste audit to find out how much waste is produced, then classify the types of different waste and identify waste 'hot spots' within the school (you can find help with this at www.recyclenow.com/schools).
- Develop an action plan on how to tackle waste in your school. Track your progress by undertaking regular measuring and monitoring (you can find help with this at www.recyclenow.com/schools).

2

Reuse – think before you throw things away

Reusing, refilling, repairing or refurbishing things will extend their life and reduce the need to buy new ones.

- Encourage pupils to use reusable bottles and flasks for drinks. This can easily be done by installing water fountains around the school and encouraging pupils to drink tap water.
- Printer cartridges: you can get your old cartridges refilled and use them again (it may take 1000 years for cartridges to decompose in landfill, and it is often cheaper to refill them than buy new).
- Stationery: reuse old envelopes for internal mail or by sticking a new label over the previous address. The same can be done for old paper or plastic folders.
- Furniture: repair or repaint items of furniture to prolong their life.

3

Recycle – recycling old products into new ones saves raw materials and energy

Recycling helps save energy and tackles climate change, and can save your school money on rubbish collections. The types of materials that can be recycled and the cost savings to the school will depend on your local authority or other waste services provider.

- Find out from your waste services provider what recycling services they offer – some of these might be free. The services offered may either be co-mingled (all items in one container) or collected in separate streams.
- You might want to start with the biggest or most popular streams like paper, cardboard, cans, glass containers, plastics bottles and cartons. You can also set up schemes for smaller, more specialised streams like ink cartridges, light bulbs, batteries and CDs.
- Make it easy to recycle by placing recycling bins in sensible areas, such as next to printers and photocopiers, classrooms, and in the staff room! These areas can be identified from a waste audit.
- Use clear posters and signs to encourage everyone to use recycling bins, and use them correctly, so this becomes second nature (you can find help with this at www.recyclenow.com/schools).
- There is no limit to how much you can recycle. With careful purchasing, determination and good recycling services you could aspire to be a zero-waste school!

4

Swap or give it away!

Could someone else use your unwanted items? Why not donate them to a local charity shop, advertise on Freecycle, or exchange them in 'swap shops' or 'give and take' days.

- Set up a scheme to collect old ink cartridges and mobile phones from the local community – some charities are keen to accept these to help raise funds (see the further information section).
- Make it easy for pupils and their families to swap, donate and exchange second hand uniforms. Run a 'reuse fashion show', a 'swap shop', or a 'give and take' day to make it easy for parents and pupils to do this.
- Contact your local charity shops or Freecycle to find a new home for other unwanted items such as furniture, books etc.
- Old books and computers can be sent abroad through donation schemes, but check there are procedures in place for maintaining the equipment and disposing of it correctly at end of life (see the further information section).

5

Get to grips with your paper and card waste

Paper and card contributes around one third of all waste in schools. It is easy to make more efficient use of paper and card, and to recycle it when you're done. It saves money too.

- Put scrap paper trays in each classroom, and in the reception office, the copier room and other places where lots of paper is generated.
- Make double-sided printing and photocopying the default, or add clear instructions next to printers on how this can be done manually. If need be run short training sessions for staff so this approach becomes routine.
- Keep boxes from deliveries if they are suitable for use in storage.
- When recycling cardboard boxes make sure you flatten them first so they do not occupy a lot of space in the recycling bins. Of course, you can also feed cardboard into your compost bins.

6

Reduce your school's food and packaging waste

Food waste makes up over one third or more of the school waste burden by weight. It rots in landfill producing methane, a gas more potent than carbon dioxide in creating climate change. It is estimated that 1.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent is released from food waste in UK landfill sites each year.

- Compost bins can be located on grass or soil and are an environmentally friendly, and educative way to dispose of fruit and vegetable waste (see the further information section).
- Incorporate composting into science lessons or eco/gardening clubs. Understanding that there is no waste in nature – only food for other species – can be inspiring for all.
- If you have too much green and vegetable waste you may be able to arrange a collection through your waste services provider. Check what types of food waste are allowed – not all take meal leftovers or meat and fish products.
- Encourage waste-free lunches by cutting down on food packaging, single-use and disposable items, and so on. This can focus on packed lunches as well as school dinners.
- Encourage healthy eating in the school by recommending no crisps, sweets or fizzy drinks days or banning soft drinks. All of these items produce waste.
- Avoid using plastic cups, cutlery and plates at school as recycling these is difficult. Use china cups and reusable cutlery in staff rooms and in refreshment and eating areas.
- Organise tasting sessions and use pupil feedback to develop new menus, portion sizes, and favourite fruit and vegetables as this will cut down on food waste.

7

Purchasing

Procurement is responsible for a large share of carbon emissions from schools – that is emissions bound up in the manufacture of the goods and services schools purchase. Sustainable procurement is now recognised as good for efficiency, value for money, fair trade and the environment – in short it is the best option for schools.

- Purchase paper, pencils and other stationary products made from 100 per cent recycled materials if possible.
- Ask your suppliers to deliver items in returnable containers, or ones which can be recycled – they should be helping you to reduce your waste, not adding to your waste problem.
- Read the companion guide to this one ‘Top tips for sustainable purchasing in schools’.
- Look out for ‘scrapstores’ that collect items from local businesses and make them available to schools at very low cost.

8

Use the power of the web

The paperless office still appears to be a distant dream! However, the use of email, document scanning, intranets, and online information can help to decrease paper use (and paper purchasing costs) if responsibly managed.

- Encourage staff to save and read documents electronically rather than always printing out hard copies.
- Offer parents the choice of receiving newsletters by email, and keep your website useful and up to date.
- ‘E-zines’ are a great way to get parents and the community involved and aware of what the school is doing.

9

Think whole school – and think big

Successful school waste initiatives are supported by the whole school, and indeed depend on everyone being aware and getting involved. Some of the leading examples are driven by the efforts of pupils, with effective support from staff.

- Pupil-led initiatives work well, with pupils taking charge of waste audits, monitoring and publicity campaigns. Some go further and rate the waste performance of their teachers!
- Regularly announce and celebrate waste successes in school assemblies, staff meetings, newsletters and on the school website.
- Use notice boards and displays around the school to make waste minimisation central to the school’s ethos. Could the school set itself the target of working towards zero waste?
- Run class competitions or recycling days to refresh pupils’ awareness of waste issues.
- Get the cleaners on your side: ensure they are familiar with what materials can be recycled, and that they are emptying them into the correct external bins.

10

Create ripples beyond the school gate

Working with the school’s wider community can provide pupils with an opportunity to bring positive change to a much wider group of people. Important life-skills can be gained and the school can develop its local, and perhaps even national, reputation.

- Measure your achievements and publicise them widely. Pupils can write letters to local newspapers on their school’s environmental efforts and successes.
- Be vocal about the message: pass information to parents and carers, and show them what the school is doing and what impact it is having. Build waste and sustainability into the core work of the school – its events, shows and public profile.
- Contact local community and environmental groups and draw on their knowledge in school initiatives. They may be able to help with composting, school gardens, or have interesting ideas for how to use waste materials.

Legislation	<p>Hazardous waste www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/topics/hazwaste/documents/haz-waste-regs-guide.pdf</p>	<p>Hazardous waste arising from your school could include redundant fluorescent tubes (strip lighting), some batteries, some toner cartridges, cooking oil and old computer equipment. Hazardous waste should be kept separately as there are regulations governing how it is handled and disposed of.</p>
	<p>WEEE Directive www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/waste/32084.aspx</p>	<p>These regulations apply to equipment that uses electricity as its main power source such as computers, printers, and so on. Schools should comply with this directive when disposing of old electrical and electronic equipment.</p>
	<p>Defra www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/</p>	<p>This website contains information on the Government's approach to waste management.</p>
Recycling and donating	<p>Recycle Now Schools www.recyclenow.com/schools</p>	<p>A mix of information and advice to help schools put recycling into practice as well as downloadable materials such as lesson plans, assembly materials and videos. Wider site contains a recycling bank locator.</p>
	<p>Recyclezone www.recyclezone.org.uk</p>	<p>Downloadable information sheets on composting, glass, paper and plastics. Great source of information on every aspect of waste.</p>
	<p>www.cartridgeworld.co.uk or call 0800 18 33 800</p>	<p>Refilling your old cartridges is easy and cost effective. This site helps you to find your nearest store.</p>
	<p>www.recycool.org</p>	<p>The Recycool programme is a great scheme for schools to collect mobile phones and cartridges for recycling.</p>
	<p>RHS school gardening campaign www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening</p>	<p>Information on how to make compost and build an organic garden.</p>
	<p>www.childrensscrapstore.co.uk</p>	<p>This site stocks items for creative play, such as paper and card, foam, plastic pots, tubes and tubs, netting, fabric, books, CDs, as well as off-cuts and leftovers from business.</p>
	<p>www.thinkcans.com www.alupro.org.uk</p>	<p>If your waste services provider does not collect aluminium cans you can set up a scheme and raise funds for charity.</p>

Recycling and donating	www.digital-links.org	An example of a UK-based charity offering collection and redistribution of computers to developing countries.
	Education for All www.educationforall.com	Charity that redistributes furniture and education resources from the UK to projects in developing countries.
	Freecycle http://uk.freecycle.org	Don't dump it, give it away. Find out about your local freecycle. You may find something you need too.
Further resources	Carbon Detectives www.carbondetectives.org.uk	Your pupils can investigate the school's carbon footprint and set targets to reduce carbon emissions.
	Waste Online www.wasteonline.org.uk	Provides in-depth information on waste, with information sheets and useful facts.
	Waste Watch www.wastewatch.org.uk	Environmental organisation specialising in the reduction of material and energy waste.
	WRAP www.wrap.org.uk/	Source of authoritative evidence, advice and solutions on waste issues, including for schools.
	Yellow woods challenge www.yellow-woods.co.uk	Campaign for schools run by Yellow Pages, working with the Woodland Trust and local authorities. Offers cash prizes for collecting and recycling yellow pages.

00368-2007LEF-EN

PPBHP(4068)/1009

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This project has been supported by the Sustainable Development Commission.

This document has been produced to support the Sustainable Schools Strategy.

For more information, go to www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools

Produced with the kind assistance of Waste Watch.