

Conducting a Waste Audit

A Simple Waste Auditing Checklist for Any Business

Taking out the trash isn't just a chore. It could be costing your business money—not to mention your customers' loyalty. Today's consumers want to support businesses with eco-friendly practices. And the more you throw out, the more you're spending on trash collection and replacement materials.

Before you can reduce waste at your organization, you need data to create the smartest plan of attack. If you don't have the information on-hand, it's time to do a waste audit.

What Is a Waste Audit?

A waste audit is a method for analyzing an organization's waste stream. The goal is to discover what types and quantities of waste (paper, plastic, food etc.) you produce within a given timeframe—usually a week. Auditing also measures how much waste is recycled vs. thrown out. Businesses usually conduct waste audits in order to set recycling, reduction and diversion goals as they prepare to go green or seek LEED Certification.

Should You DIY or Hire a Service?

Businesses that produce a relatively small amount of trash (offices, boutique stores etc.) or who simply want some baseline data often conduct their audit themselves. "DIY audits are good for small educational events to highlight the types of waste generated," says Ross Guberman of waste auditing service Great Forest.

But according to Guberman, "Waste audits conducted for a specific purpose should always be done by experienced experts such as Great Forest. We know what to look out for, and more importantly, how to analyze the data properly." Guberman recommends hiring a service for projects like:

Seeking LEED or TRUE certification.

Determining storage and equipment needs during construction. Creating a waste-related request for proposal (RPF).

If you've decided to do it yourself, keep reading for our step-by-step waste audit checklist. Even if you're hiring a service, take a look to understand how your audit will work.

How to Conduct a Waste Audit

Step 1. Assemble a Team & Set a Date

Find a volunteer from each department to form your waste auditing team. Aim for at least five people. It is recommended that you make this group an ongoing “Sustainability Committee” who can oversee any changes you want to make as a result of your audit.

Next, pick a week for the audit. You want a clear picture of your normal trash output, so choose a week without any special events and when most of your staff will be in the office. If you have outside custodial staff, make sure they know to hold off on emptying the trash that week.

2. Determine Your Waste Categories

Before “Waste Audit Week” rolls around, make a list of the most common trash types your business produces. This list can be general for now—if the audit reveals different categories, you can always add them to the list as you go.

Common Waste Audit Categories:

Paper

Cardboard

Plastic bottles Other plastic Aluminum cans Glass

Food waste Materials packaging Signage

Display materials

3. Gather Your Tools

Before the main event, you’ll need to stock up on a few supplies to make sure your team can work safely.

Tools Needed for a Waste Audit:

An open area for sorting the trash.

Rubber gloves for each volunteer.

Face masks for each volunteer.

Tongs for each volunteer (optional).

Labelled boxes for sorting each waste category. A bathroom scale for weighing each category. Clipboards for recording your findings.

Trash bags for re-bagging your waste after the audit.

4. Sort Your Trash

It’s time for the real work to begin. Here’s how to do a waste audit.

1. At the end of the week, round up all the trash and recycling from your building.
2. If you’d like to gather department-specific data, label each trash bag with the department it came from.
3. Weigh all the trash to get a baseline for how much you throw out each week.
4. Weigh all the recyclables to establish how much you recycle each week.
5. Wearing gloves, sort all materials into the boxes for their categories. If you labelled your trash by department, make sure each has separate boxes.
6. As you work, note any recyclables mixed in with trash.
7. Once everything has been sorted, weigh each category.

5. Analyze Your Results

Now that you've recorded all weights, you can use this data for a waste stream analysis.

1. Calculate and record your waste diversion rate using this process:
Divide the weight of your recyclables by the combined weight of all your waste (trash + recyclables). Multiply the result by 100.
This gives you the percentage of waste you divert from the landfill each week.
2. Look at the weights you recorded for individual waste categories.
Which categories are highest?
Did the highest categories differ between departments?
Did you find any recyclables mixed in with the trash?
Were there categories you didn't realize you had?

Don't lose track of this waste audit report. As you take steps to reduce waste, these numbers will become a powerful marketing tool you can use to show customers how hard you're working at greening your operation.

Next Steps After Waste Auditing

So, you've conducted your audit and completed your waste stream analysis. Now what?

1. Determine whether your dumpster size and pickup frequency still matches your needs. If your trash output changed, a different size or number of pickups may be more cost-effective.
2. Hire a recycling service if you don't already have one. If you're only recycling a few items, consider recycling more—either through your current service or one that specializes in waste from your industry.
3. Set a goal for increasing your recycling rate.
4. Create recycling guidelines for meeting that goal and share them with your staff.
5. Set a goal for reducing the amount of waste in your largest categories.
6. Determine the steps to meet that goal and let your staff know. For example, you might switch to online bill pay to reduce paper. Or buy a different coffee maker to avoid wasteful coffee pods.
7. Identify any items you can reuse. For example, can you repair or recycle your electronics (e-waste) instead of purchasing new ones? Can you repurpose any of your packaging materials?
8. Decide on a timeline for meeting your recycling and reduction goals. One or two years usually makes sense. Plan to conduct another waste audit at that time to see if you met your goals.

Ready for Waste Auditing?

Using this method, a waste audit will show you where to focus your efforts as you work toward a greener corporate culture. You may even discover that you're saving money as you find new ways to reduce waste.

Source: <https://www.dumpsters.com/blog/how-to-conduct-a-waste-audit>