

Zero Waste Can Be a Reality!



Everything we buy and use comes from somewhere, and that somewhere is our planet Earth. Many resources took millions of years to develop and are not renewable, which means that once they are removed from the ground, they cannot be replaced.

As our world population grows and needs additional resources to maintain and sustain life, it is important that we understand the connection of what we buy and use and the impact or potential toll that it takes on our limited resources.

Initiatives to reduce waste as well as to increase energy efficiency, reduce water consumption, alter transportation patterns and expand alternative fuels are essential components to having a sustainable world.

What is zero waste?

According to the Grassroots Recycling Network, the definition of “zero waste” is minimizing waste, maximizing recycling, reducing consumption and ensuring that products are made to be reused, repaired or recycled back into nature or the marketplace (GRRN.org).

Take Inventory - how many of the following habits, activities or programs do you do at school?

REDUCE	REUSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote “waste-free” lunches • Set printer for two-sided copies by default • Have “Be Nice Use It Twice” boxes for paper only used on one side • Send out electronic school newsletters, or • Send one newsletter home per family, rather than one per student (especially effective when there are multiple siblings at the school) • Post announcements on a central message board, use a dry erase board or Power Point instead of a paper agenda at meetings • Provide reusable mugs and plates for meetings and parties • Borrow or rent equipment that is seldom used – repair items when possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate a school or district-wide exchange for gently-used items: CD/DVD’s, books, games, puzzles, costumes, formal wear, sports equipment, or have a school-wide rummage sale • <i>Trash to Treasure</i> Projects – make paper, jewelry, art projects, etc. out of odds and ends that would normally be thrown away • Make scratch pads or journals from paper that has only been used on one side • Have an area with recovered school supplies for anyone to use • Reuse file folders, envelopes and cardboard boxes • Donate gently-used items

RECYCLE	BUY RECYCLED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aluminum Cans • Paper and Cardboard • Milk/Juice Cartons • Compost Food Scraps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - On site in tumblers 2 - Indoors Vermi-composting Bins (worms) 3 - Service provider (pick-up service) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glass Bottles • Plastic Bottles • Other – ask hauler • Purchase supplies in bulk, with little or no packaging, that contain recycled-content, such as paper, envelopes, pencils, folders, etc. • Purchase eco-friendly team t-shirts • Stock school store with recycled-content supplies (See SWANCC's <i>Eco-Friendly Marketplace</i> guide) • Use eco-friendly cleaning products

Other Tips

- Plug all electronics into a power strip – turn off at night/weekends/holiday breaks
- Turn off lights when not in the room or use natural light as much as possible
- Encourage students and teachers to carpool, bike or walk to school
- Buy rechargeable batteries
- Start a garden, rain garden and set up rain barrels
- Upgrade lighting to LED where possible
- Install programmable thermostats and solar panels if possible

Are You Up for the Zero Garbage Challenge?

Remove garbage cans from all classrooms and common areas. For one week, give each student and teacher a plastic bag to wear around their waist to collect the garbage they produce. At the end of each day, weight the waste and then engage in conversation based on the findings in the bags. Could the waste have been reduced? Can it be recycled, composted, reused, donated or repaired? Visit swancc.org for related activities and resources.

Other Resources

Wasted Food Action Alliance – *Toolkit to Reduce Food Waste in K-12 Schools*

<https://wastedfoodaction.org/school-toolkit/>

Smarter Lunchroom Movement – smarterlunchrooms.org

Illinois Food Scrap Coalition (Composting) – illinoiscomposts.org

Seven Generations Ahead – *Zero Waste Schools*

<https://sevengenerationsahead.org/zero-waste/>

Green Schools Alliance – greenschoolsalliance.org

Green Schools National Network – greenschoolsnationalnetwork.org

National Environmental Education Foundation – NEEFUSA.org

National Wildlife Federation – Eco Schools – NWF.org/Eco-Schools-USA.aspx

Project Learning Tree – PLT.org

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – EPA.gov

**Let the zero waste countdown begin. 3...2...1...Zero
Blast-Off!**

Call SWANCC at (847) 724-9205 or info@swancc.org if you have any questions or need information about a specific waste reduction activity or recycling program or visit swancc.org.