

Waste Team

In nature, what is considered waste by one animal or plant helps another to survive. However, we humans often create waste that benefits no one and harms many. Consider these waste facts:

- The waste that we produce goes one of two places: a landfill and/or an incinerator. Landfills are big holes in the ground where waste is piled so tightly that the decomposition process is virtually nonexistent. There are some landfills where they have dug up newspapers from the 1960's and you can still read them! The toxins from landfills eventually leach into groundwater.
 - Incinerators are large operations that burn trash. While some incinerators produce energy from the trash that is burned, all of them release toxins into the air such as mercury, carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas), and dioxin (one of the most toxic chemicals known to man).
 - The majority of what we throw out is food waste and paper—two things that can be easily recycled. Food waste can be composted to make a rich soil, and paper can be recycled many times to make new paper and other products.
 - Recycling saves energy! Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a TV for 3 hours. Manufacturing items from recycled materials requires much less energy than manufacturing them from virgin materials.
 - Some of the items in our waste stream—such as electronics, paint and batteries—are considered hazardous waste and severely impact the environment and communities. For example, electronics are often shipped to developing countries once we're done with them; people in those communities disassemble them and burn the wiring to find valuable components. These practices expose these communities to some of the deadliest toxins—heavy metals, carcinogens and dioxin. One community in China with a history of electronics disposal has the highest level of dioxin anywhere in the world.
1. Does the house of worship recycle or reuse the following items? Please describe activities for each.
 - Plastic
 - Glass
 - Paper
 - Batteries, printer cartridges and other miscellaneous items

- Electronics
 - Clothing or other reusable items
2. Is recycling commingled (the municipality collects recyclables mixed together)?
 3. As you tour the building, what areas do you think are most in need of waste/recycling receptacles? Make notes about these areas, or draw a map to indicate where receptacles should go. **Tip:** Keep members' habits in mind, and envision the ways in which they explore and walk the building. There will inevitably be areas that capture more waste than others.
 4. Are any of the following activities in place to improve recycling rates?
 - Waste receptacles always clustered together—paper, can/bottle and trash bins placed together in every trash collection location (no receptacle is ever found alone). Keep in mind this recommendation is only valid if recyclables are not commingled
 - Signs located above each waste disposal bin to designate what items should be deposited in each bin. For instance, the paper bin would have a sign that says 'Paper'.
 - Each waste disposal bin has a lid appropriate for the type of refuse that goes inside. For instance, a can/bottle bin would have a lid with a circular hole in it. Only valid if recyclables are not commingled.
 5. Has the house of worship implemented any of the following waste reduction practices?
 - Zero-waste events. Zero-waste events produce no real waste—reusable dinnerware is used, and any waste produced is compostable.
 - Reusable dinnerware and utensils. If the institution uses some disposable dinnerware and some reusable, please describe details here.
 6. If disposable dinnerware is used, what type is it? For instance: plastic, Styrofoam, paper, or bio-compostable. Please describe.
 7. Does the house of worship compost its food waste?

8. Up to 40% of the typical institution's waste stream is paper. Has the congregation implemented any of the following paper waste reduction practices?
- A double-sided printing policy
 - Paper reuse bins in each office
 - A printer tray designated for used paper (where one side is still suitable for printing purposes)?
9. Does the institution purchase recycled-content paper? If yes, what percentage of post-consumer recycled content does the paper contain (e.g. 30% or 100%)? Is the paper Forest Stewardship Council certified? **Tip:** Look in the offices or storage closet for the recycled content or FSC symbol.



10. Has the institution educated members and staff about waste reduction, such as through signs? Please describe these activities.
11. Do staff at the house of worship know where the trash goes after it leaves their institution (e.g. a landfill in X city, or an incinerator in Y town)?

How about sewage waste? How is it handled and where does it go?

Questions to Consider:

1. Why is it important for congregations to reduce their waste?
2. What are key opportunities in the area of waste reduction that you learned about through this audit?
3. What can this house of worship do differently to reduce and better manage waste in their building?