

How to Run a Detailed School Cafeteria Waste Audit

A detailed waste audit is a good way to find out what is actually in the cafeteria waste stream and how much of it can be diverted from incineration.

What you need:

- Excel spreadsheet or paper recording sheets (and a clipboard)
- Scale – the DPW can provide luggage scales for you to use
- Large tub with handles – the tub is for holding each bag of trash while you're weighing it
- Trash barrel on wheels for transporting bags of trash
- Gloves (either disposable or waterproof work)
- Phone to record the event and/or for entering data
- 3 waterproof, 9'x12' tarps
- 3 barrels or buckets to collect compost, recyclables, and trash
- Tongs or grabbers for those sorting
- Scoop shovel
- Straw broom and dust pan for clean up
- Extra trash bags

Where to have the audit:

- Give yourself plenty of space. Outside in front of the school (weather permitting – no precipitation or wind) is a good site because it creates attention and gives onlookers room to note what is going on.

Working with the custodian(s) and collecting the trash for weighing:

- Make sure the custodians know what you're up to. They are great at getting the trash emptied during and after every lunch. If they know the plan, they can set the trash aside for you. The custodian will appreciate if, when you're finished, you return the trash to a designated spot near the dumpster so they can dispose of it.
- It's probably best to conduct the detailed audit after school when you have more time.

Weighing and recording of the total trash before separation with a luggage scale:

- Weigh the empty tub first so you can allow for its weight in the tally.

- Put a bag of trash in the tub, pick up the tub (hooking it onto the scale), and record its weight minus the weight of the tub.
- Record and repeat until you've weighed all the bags of trash.

Separating the waste into three piles:

- Lay out the 3 waterproof tarps.
- Empty all the trash bags onto one of the tarps.
- Using gloved hands and tongs/grabbers pull out the trash and the recyclables and put them in separate piles on the remaining tarps. The organics/compost will remain on the original tarp.
- You will have three piles: organics/compost, recyclables, and trash.

Weighing and recording of organics/compost, recyclables, and trash:

- Use the shovel to load the buckets or barrels with the organics/compost for weighing and recording.
- Similarly, weigh and record the recyclables and then the trash.

Cleanup:

- Use the extra trash bags to collect all the refuse.
- Use the brooms and dust pan to be sure the area is cleaner than when you started.
- This is often a good time to pick up any litter in the area as well.
- Take all those bags of trash back to the agreed upon area near the dumpster. Alert the custodian(s) that they are there so they can be disposed of properly and in a timely manner.