

# Waste Audit Guidelines

## Why do a Waste Audit?

There are several ways to conduct a waste audit, below is a simple procedure for conducting an audit of your operations yourself. Waste audits are useful as a way to quantify what is being thrown away and identify changes you can make to improve your waste reduction efforts and your recycling program. A waste audit can also help you determine if any new programs should be implemented, such as a composting program.

## Step 1: Gather Information and Develop a Plan

Before starting your audit, you will want to take a look at our current waste hauler's records. Find out how much waste is being removed from your operations on a weekly or monthly basis and calculate your total waste generation. Once you know how much your operations is generating, you will want to think about the type of data you want to find from this audit, such as what materials are you and/or your customers throwing in the trash when they could be recycled or composted instead. Depending on the type of data you want to find, you can usually find out the needed information with one day's worth of waste. Note: if you share a dumpster with a neighboring business, you will need to keep your waste separate. If you generate enough waste that a full day's sample would be unrealistic for your location or team to handle, audit half of that, or a smaller amount, but be sure to sort bags from all areas of your operations.

If you already recycle and compost at your location, you will want to sort this material (from the corresponding time period) separately. The data from these sorts will tell you the amount you are already recycling and composting, which you will want to add to your waste audit data for total volumes. It will also give you some insight into any trash that is contaminating your recycling or composting stream.

*Tip: The idea of this audit is to get a basic overview of your waste stream and opportunities to optimize it. If your operation's production fluctuates significantly by day or season, you may want to conduct audits at different times or select a typical/average day.*

## Step 2: Designate an Audit Team and Gather Supplies

Consider involving employees from all areas of your operations. For example, someone from back of house may have a better understanding of those operations than someone who works in the front of house area. A good team will make for a great audit!

Gather your team and explain what your goals for the audit will be and instructions for each station you plan to set up. Here's what you will need:

1. 3-4 people
2. Plastic tarp
3. Impermeable (Nitrile) gloves (for the hygiene and safety of sorting team)
4. Aprons
5. 5-gallon buckets (at least 7)
6. Signage for each bucket
7. Scale (if you would like to weigh your waste)
8. Camera (if you would like to photo document the audit)
9. [Waste Audit Form](#) (See "Waste Audit Form Instructions" below)



Lay out the tarp as a sorting area. The buckets will be used to collect and weigh items. Label the buckets according to the material categories. The different categories are usually plastics, glass, metals, paper, organics, and other (anything that was not classified as another category).

### Step 3: Conduct the Waste Audit

Separating waste from each area of your operation is recommended, but at a minimum, separate your areas into two: Front of House and Back of House. However you have defined your areas, sort and record waste from each area individually. Dump one or two bags on the tarp at a time and sort the items into the labeled buckets. Remember, everything should fit into a category; everything down to the smallest scrap of paper must be sorted into a designated bucket. Do the same with any recycling or composting bags you collect as well and keep those separate from the trash to record.

### Step 4: Record and Calculate Data

After sorting a sample, record the quantities by weight, volume or both on the audit form. Using both weight and volume is recommended, but if you do not have a scale, just calculate your numbers by volume in gallons. If you are weighing the samples, don't forget to subtract the difference of the weight of the bucket (tare weight). If you are sorting waste from individual areas separately, use a separate sheet for each area by duplicating the audit form and assigning each form an area.

Total your numbers and evaluate the data. Some questions to consider during this review would be:

1. Did you find items that could be recycled in the trash?
  - a. From what area(s)? Front or back of house?
  - b. Can you tell who might be throwing away recyclables? Team members or customers? How might you educate them to not do this?
2. Did you find trash in the recycling bins?
  - a. From what area(s)? Front or back of house?
  - b. Can you tell who might be throwing trash into the recycling bin? Team members or customers? How might you educate them to not do this?
3. Did you find items that could be composted in the trash?
  - a. Assuming you are not already composting, is there a composting option in your area? Can you compost on-site?
4. Are there changes that you can make to procurement to reduce your waste stream, or optimize it for the recycling and composting options available to you?

Once all materials have been recorded and weighed, dispose of the material from your audit.

Conducting a waste audit is a key step in identifying and prioritizing steps to reduce your waste. Quantifying what you are throwing away and how much you are paying to do so can help management and employees take action to reduce your waste.

### Waste Audit Form Instructions

The [Waste Audit Form](#) is an Excel spreadsheet that will calculate your operation's total waste and percentages for you. The form is divided into three sheets (Front of House, Back of House, Total Operations), plus a Printable Audit Form to be used to record data manually, if needed. Use a separate sheet for each area of your operation being audited. You can enter the data into the spreadsheet as you



go, or enter it in once the audit is complete; each sheet contain formulas for entering data. Once all the data is entered, the "Total Operations" sheet will calculate totals for both areas of your operations.

If you decide to also audit your recycling and composting streams, you should use a new waste audit form to calculate the weight and percentages of each of the wastes in recycling and composting, too. If you choose to add an additional sheet, duplicate one of the data sheets in the spreadsheet. In this case, you will need to add these new sheets to the "total operations" formulas.

