

# Creating less Trash at School

There are lots of ways that we can reduce waste at school. By thinking ahead and being creative, you can reduce your impact on the environment and save money at the same time.

## What's the problem?

Garbage follows us everywhere we go. We generate waste at home, work, and school. In fact in **one week**, the average Minnesotan throws away more than **40 pounds of garbage**. The garbage generated in Minnesota in one year would fill four lanes of trucks, bumper-to-bumper, stretching from Albert Lea to International Falls. Even with our best efforts to recycle and compost, the amount of garbage keeps increasing every year.



Packaging amounts to 32 percent of Minnesota's garbage. Typically, the more packaging a product has, the more expensive it is. You can save up to 50 percent of the cost of a product by buying the **least packaged product**.

The good news is that everyone can do something to reduce the amount of trash they throw away.

Even while at school each of us can have a major impact on the amount of garbage produced in our state by becoming aware of how much we throw out and changing some of our **habits** when buying and using things.



## What can I do?

### Pack a no-waste lunch

A no-waste lunch is a meal that does not end up in the trash. You can buy food items in bulk then put them in reusable containers to carry to school.

**Example:** Use a reusable lunch box or bag and fill it with your lunch in reusable containers. You could also include a cloth napkin – don't forget to bring it home so you can wash it and use it again. Another idea is to ask your school cafeteria to use items such as reusable trays, napkins, and silverware.

**Benefits:** You create less waste by using washable containers to pack your lunch. Packing your food in reusables is typically less expensive than buying food that comes in disposable containers.



TO LEARN MORE  
[www.reduce.org](http://www.reduce.org)



## Carry a few reusables

At the beginning of each school year, it seems as if we need to buy lots of supplies. When you go to the store, look for durable, long-lasting supplies.

**Example:** Refillable pens and pencils, a durable backpack, and a lunchbox are all great examples of products that can be used over and over again.

**Benefits:** Items that can be used more than once will reduce waste. If you take care of them, they will last a long time — and maybe you won't have to buy new ones next year!



## Take only as much food as you will eat

More than 20 percent of the food we buy gets thrown away. One way to figure out how much food you waste is to measure and track all the food you throw away from your lunch over a fixed period of time. Then you could brainstorm ways to reduce how much food you are throwing in the garbage.



**Example:** If you are bringing lunch from home, you can use an icepack so that it stays fresh until it is eaten. If you buy from the school cafeteria, only take a small portion of food; if you're still hungry, go back for seconds!

**Benefits:** About 48 million tons of food are thrown away in the United States each year. By taking only what you can eat or sharing your extras with a friend, you are taking steps to waste less and save money.

## Use less paper

Even though we recycle much of the paper we use, it is still a significant part of what we throw in the trash. Think about all of the paper you've thrown away that only had writing on one side. Those pieces of paper could have been used a second time, potentially cutting your paper use in half. Also, by buying paper and notebooks that contain recycled paper, you complete the recycling loop.



**Example:** Make room in your classroom or at home to put paper that has only been used on one side. Use that paper for notes, or feed the blank side into your printer for draft documents. You can also make scratch pads out of that single-sided paper by binding one side. Can you "go paperless?" Ask your teacher if you can hand in assignments on a computer disk or via e-mail instead.

**Benefits:** Because paper and packaging make up such a large part of our garbage, by using less paper you can reduce up to 40 percent of the trash that is thrown away.



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[www.reduce.org](http://www.reduce.org)

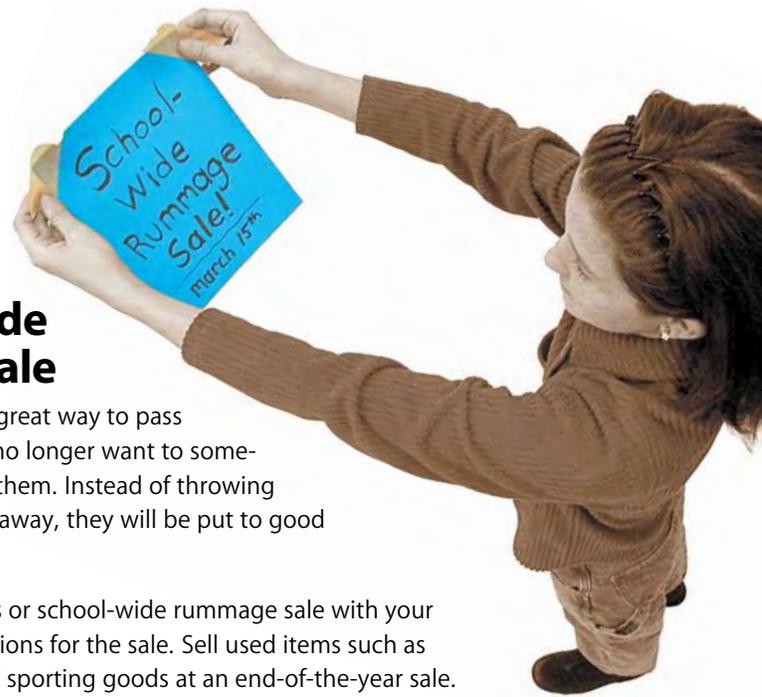


## Conduct a junk mail campaign

Another large source of paper that is thrown away every day is unsolicited mail. You can help your school office collect unsolicited mail and contact the companies to get off their lists.

**Example:** Make this into a project by measuring how much unsolicited mail your school receives in a week. Tear off the mailing labels and send them back to the mailer along with a note saying, "Please take us off your list." After a few months, measure the unsolicited mail again. You can then determine how much waste has been eliminated; think about the staff time saved by not having to go through all of that unwanted mail.

**Benefits:** Decreasing junk mail not only saves paper and reduces paper waste, but takes less time to sort and recycle the mail each day.



## Organize a school-wide rummage sale

Rummage sales are a great way to pass along items that you no longer want to someone who might need them. Instead of throwing your unwanted items away, they will be put to good use.

**Example:** Plan a class or school-wide rummage sale with your teacher. Collect donations for the sale. Sell used items such as clothes, furniture, and sporting goods at an end-of-the-year sale.

**Benefits:** Buying used items is not only cheaper, but someone else's trash might be your treasure!

### Used Chic

*Buying things used is inexpensive and prevents waste. Don't let current fashion fads dictate what you buy: set your own style.*



Wool sweater: \$3.50



Yellow bicycle: \$10



Boombox: \$15

## Duluth School gets A's in Reduceology 101

Stowe Elementary School in Duluth instituted a waste reduction program in the school that focused on the cafeteria. They switched from disposables to reusables, started to separate recyclables, increased food ordering accuracy, and set up a vermiculture project (worm bins) to compost food waste.

In a second project, they created model service learning projects. The projects took what students learned within the classroom and applied it outside of the classroom for the benefit of the Stowe enrollment community. Projects included reseeding a bare field adjacent to the school, building a composting system for the zoo, helping control trail erosion along some park trails, and creating awareness of how drains link directly to the river by stenciling them. They also organized a community-based service learning project by creating a nature trail near the school.

Their most recent project focuses on alternative energy. Stowe School purchased solar panels, a wind turbine, and

an inside meter to measure the energy created and the electricity used in the school's worm composting building. The school will teach students about energy generation and consumption for grades kindergarten through fifth grade.



## Get informed and become more aware

Talk to your teacher about starting or joining an environmental group at school or look for ways to increase your awareness of natural surroundings and environmental issues.

**Example:** Set up a school waste reduction campaign with your environmental club. You could turn visits to nature areas and parks into service learning class projects.

**Benefits:** Being informed about environmental issues will give you the knowledge to help yourself and others become environmentally friendly. Connecting your activities with nature helps to increase appreciation and gives extra motivation to take actions to preserve and protect it.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO:

[www.reduce.org](http://www.reduce.org)

## Attention educators:



[www.seek.state.mn.us](http://www.seek.state.mn.us)



Minnesota's interactive directory of environmental education resources

- Thousands of EE resources
- Information about EE organizations
- Job postings, calendar, news
- *A GreenPrint for Minnesota*
- *Environmental Literacy Scope and Sequence*
- *MN Report Card on Environmental Literacy*

### Contact:

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Minnesota Pollution  
Control Agency

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Your county solid waste office is a great resource for waste reduction materials, including local waste and environmental information, education resources, and speakers.

Printed on 30% post-consumer recycled chlorine-free (PCF) paper with agri-based inks.