

Business Waste Reduction Project Toolkit Step 2: Assess Waste Practices

Assessing Waste Practices

Assessing your waste stream will provide you with a better understanding of the main types of wastes your organisation generates and how to go about making improvements.

To get a good overall picture, we recommend that you undertake the following:

- **Review current waste management and purchasing records.** This will provide you with an indication of current waste management and service costs.
- **Conduct a waste assessment.** This will assist you with quantifying or measuring the different types of wastes your organisation generates, and will also show levels of compliance with recycling.
- **Conduct a site analysis.** To assess the effectiveness of systems currently in place and opportunities for improvement
- **Compile and present results.**

The main purpose of a waste assessment is to examine each process step to determine where wastes are produced and to devise measures for waste prevention.

Before you begin

Contact your local waste removal contractors and ask them to provide you with a list of the services they offer for general waste, recyclable materials and organic waste. Most waste removal contractors offer a range of bin sizes and prices for waste, recyclable and organic materials, and also a flexible collection schedule.

You can also contact your local council for a list of the services they provide.



Assessing waste practices is one of the most important processes involved in reducing waste as it helps to identify areas of the waste stream where improvement is possible.

1. Review Records

The type of records you should consider reviewing include waste management and disposal records and contracts. These records will help you identify and calculate disposal cost savings resulting from your program. You may need to obtain approval from senior management to review contractor and cleaning information.

- Recycling records and contracts
- Purchasing and inventory records
- Maintenance and operating logs
- Equipment service contracts and invoices

Included in [Appendix 3](#) is an example record keeping template that will assist you with recording this information. This information is not only useful to benchmark your current waste management practices, but also to identify possible opportunities for reducing collection and disposal costs once your Waste Reduction Program is in place.

2. Quantifying your waste stream

There are a few ways of quantifying your waste stream. However, for the purpose of this project we are going to focus on conducting a **Waste Assessment**. A Waste Assessment is a visual analysis of the types and quantities of waste found in your waste stream. It involves walking through your business premises and analysing the contents of all bins (or a representative sample) and will provide you with an indication of the main types of materials in your waste streams. To assist you to prepare for your waste assessment, we have included a checklist in [Appendix 4](#).

3. Preparing for a waste assessment

You will need to plan ahead for a waste assessment.
Below is a list of considerations:

Date and time of assessment: The sample needs to be representative of normal waste patterns so make sure you conduct your assessment on a typical working day, and preferably later in the day when waste will be present (but before the cleaners empty bins). Do not inform staff of the date and time the assessment will be conducted, as this may influence waste trends.

Waste Assessment team: It is a good idea to work in teams of two. Assessors can then compare waste content estimations and discuss possible ideas for improvement.

Waste Assessment Materials: gloves, waste assessment forms, clipboards, pens / pencils, calculator, camera, tongs. Sample waste assessment forms have been included in [Appendix 5](#).

OH&S: Consult your OH&S officer prior to the assessment and inform them of your intentions. At no time should you put an unprotected hand into a bin. Wear gloves and use tongs if you can't see all the contents of the bin. Wash your hands thoroughly at the end of the exercise.

Confidentiality: Be mindful of your fellow colleague's privacy when inspecting bins.

Cleaners: After obtaining authorisation from senior management to conduct a waste assessment, make sure cleaners and security are informed of your plans.

4. Conducting a Waste Assessment

To conduct a **waste assessment** you will need: Waste assessment team/s, inspection and OH&S materials, waste assessment forms and site analysis forms.

Waste assessors need to examine each area where wastes are produced. An example waste assessment form has been included, and can be modified depending on the type of waste materials your organisation generates and the type of materials recovered for recycling.

Each assessment team is to estimate (by volume) the proportion of the main material types within each bin (both general garbage, recycling and organics bins).

5. Site Analysis

A **site analysis** should be conducted at the same time as the Visual Inspection. The purpose of a site analysis is to record qualitative information to accompany your volume estimations. Record such things as:

- **Examples of waste items that frequently occur** (for example disposable paper cups, plastic cutlery, takeaway food packaging, plastic bags).
- **Any waste reduction initiatives that you can see** (such as a box for recycling one-sided paper, used envelopes recycled as interoffice envelopes).
- **Possible reasons why staff aren't recycling** (recycling bins may be full or not conveniently located).

We have included a form in [Appendix 6](#) to assist you with ideas for conducting a site analysis.

6. Compiling and presenting results

Once you have all the completed data forms you will need to compile and interpret the results. Some of the most useful conclusions you can draw from your data include:

Average volume of waste in each bin. This will provide you with an indication of the total volume of waste that staff generate each day / week.

Average volume of the different material types in bins (i.e. 2 litres paper, 3 litres of recyclable cans, bottles and plastics). This will provide you with an indication of the different types of wastes generated and the relative proportions of each.

Proportion of non-recyclable materials in recycling bins and the proportion of recyclable materials in the general waste bins.

Also remember to summarise the comments made during the site analysis.