HOW TO CONDUCT A PERSONAL WASTE AUDIT

What is a personal waste audit?
A personal waste audit answers the question: How much waste do I produce at home and on the go? Tracking the types and amount of waste you produce over a period of time—a week, a month, or longer—will quickly make you aware of what you’re throwing out!

What types of waste do I include in the audit?
Include items that you:
- discard as trash
- recycle
- compost

How long should I track?
Aim to track your waste for one week. If you track for fewer days, that’s okay! Bring whatever insights you have to our SSN meeting on September 10. Of course, you’re welcome to extend your audit for longer. (You may be surprised by items that sneak into your waste bin only after many days of tracking.)

How do I conduct my personal waste audit?
In this audit, we’re aiming to track what (type of items) and how much. For this second measurement, counting the number of each item is easiest, though some sustainability educators measure waste by volume or weight. Experiment with this, if you like.

There are 2 main approaches to carrying out your survey:
1) Track as you go. Keep pen and paper near the waste bins in your home. When you put something in the bin, list the item and keep a running tally. Easy, right?! A separate tracking page can be kept in your car, bag, or desk to record waste disposed of “on the go.” Alternatively, if you take your mobile phone everywhere, you might prefer to use your device for tracking. But, make sure you record all the waste!
2) Track by diving in. Prefer to do your tallying all at once? Or want to find out how much waste is generated by your entire family? This is another great approach. At the end of the day, sort the contents of your waste bins by placing similar items into piles on spread-out newspaper. Then categorize, count, and record the items you find. Repeat each day.

For our SSN discussion, we encourage you to track waste for one week from your:
- Bathroom
- Bedroom
- Kitchen

Feeling ambitious? Add other spaces to your audit—car, work or home office, garage, laundry room, yard or patio, etc.—to gain a fuller picture of your waste footprint. See Chapter 2 of Amy Korst’s book, The Zero-Waste Lifestyle, if you’d like to learn how to conduct an in-depth home-waste audit and measure your waste-reduction progress.

I have my data. Now what?
Well done! Do you notice any patterns? What types of waste were most prevalent? Were there any items that surprised you? What space poses the greatest challenge? Why do you think that is?

We hope you’ll attend SSN’s September meeting (September 10 at noon, on Zoom), where we’ll have the opportunity to share and discuss the items topping our audit lists. Then, we’ll brainstorm ways to reduce our waste. We invite you to share a waste item from your week (or a photo of it, if you don’t want to save it), or recommend a product or technique that helps you reduce your waste.

Remember, the goal is not zero-waste perfection—but to make bolder changes over time that benefit our well-being, campus, and San Diego community.

We look forward to seeing you!