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**ZEROWASTE**  
NEW ZEALAND LTD

## **A HOUSEHOLD AUDIT OF WASTE**

A solid waste audit is a useful tool to help find out what waste your household is producing so that you can find ways to reduce the waste or find ways to recycle or reuse it.

This guide is to help you do this and come out with some data which we can use for future planning.

For a household it is very simple because there is not too much rubbish. (For a bigger establishment we use guidelines at [www.zerowaste.co.nz/assets/BusinessSolutions/wasteaudit.pdf](http://www.zerowaste.co.nz/assets/BusinessSolutions/wasteaudit.pdf) )

So here are the steps:

1. Save all the rubbish and recycling for a week, this includes all food scraps, bottles, take-out containers, paper , nappies, tissues etc. For food scraps if you can, put them in a bag in a freezer or fridge to keep them from smelling too much, or you can weight them and measure them during the week and accumulate the results. Whatever you do keep the nappies and the food separate from the rest of the waste for this week.
2. If you have a door-to-door or regular rubbish removal make sure your audit doesn't disappear suddenly; plan it so you can finish the audit just prior to collection. Let all the family know, but try not to change your habits because the audit is underway.
3. Before you sort the material out there are a few preparations and rules :
  - a. Categories of waste- how are we going to divide the waste up?  
Attached is a form which suggests how you could divide up the waste, this uses common categories which also relate to how we might get rid of them in the end. There are gaps in the form to fill out with extra things you might have in your waste.
  - b. How are we going to measure it?  
There are two ways: one weight the sorted waste, or if you haven't got scales estimate the volume. For instance you might have half a rubbish sack of food waste. The

easiest way to weight at home is to use your bathroom scales (borrow some if your house hasn't any). Then you can weight a family member, get them to hold the waste in a container, weight them again, then take off the weight of the family member and the container. Maths practise for the primary school children! For small amounts you can use kitchen scales, but leave out the family member, especially if you have borrowed the scales!!

- c. How are we going to do this safely?  
To sort through rubbish you should wear rubber or plastic gloves and definitely wash the gloves and your hands well after the audit. Even wearing the gloves don't put your hands into the middle of the rubbish. Only handle what you can see, that way you won't get hurt if there is broken glass or something sharp in the waste. If someone has had a cold or hay fever and put their used tissues in; use disposable chopsticks or tongs to sort it out. Better still ask family members to collect their tissues in a plastic bag for the week and just sort them in the bag. Be careful.
- d. How are we going to record this?  
Appoint a recorder for your family. Their job is to write down the weights and/or volumes for each category on the record sheet and make sure the weight of the container is deducted each time. A clipboard is a great idea. How about some photos too?
- e. Setting up and sorting out-  
Find a table you can use and cover it with plastic or a tarp, tie or tape the tarp to the legs. Put the table in a well ventilated area like a car port, out of the sun and rain and wind.

Arrange a container, a carton, a plastic bag for each of your waste categories label them if possible, and arrange them next to your table. Plastic bags will sometimes bulldog clip onto the table. If you are using cartons, weight them before you start and write the weight on the side. This will help your recorder.

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Assemble the family and make sure they know the rules especially the safety issues. Appoint the recorder, the photographer, the sorter etc  
Tip out the unsorted waste, sort, weight, estimate, record and take photos.

As you weight the material put it into a bag for final disposal or recycling.  
Make sure hands, scales, tongs etc all get washed after the audit.

f. Conclusions

How much of the waste could you avoid buying? How much do you recycle? How much more could you recycle?

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