

Waste Audit Guide

1. Prepare to complete a waste sort

We need to find out exactly what happens to all waste types, who collects what waste, when and how (in bags? straight into the bin?), where it's stored, and who takes it away for disposal and how often. Land-filled waste should be eliminated so isolate recyclable waste, such as paper, cardboard or plastic. Consider what other information you could collect to make your waste data more useful (eg, staff numbers in various workplaces).

2. Check how waste is generated

Can staff and/or cleaners put waste into bags labelled with where they are from, the date, etc? If you can't get the waste before it goes into the skip, can you get waste out of the skip (you don't want to walk on top of rubbish)? Where can you put it once sorted (not too far away, so that you can easily put the rubbish back into the skip without having to lift it too high)? Think about how much waste you want to sort. It is recommended that you sample a week's waste (i.e. pull aside a number of bags every day for a week and then sort them). This will give you a sample of that season's waste. You may want to make notes of any significant events that week (eg, an office party or new delivery of products).

3. Know when waste is generated

Pick the right time to measure, consider whether the waste stream varies from day to day, season to season, etc. How much waste do you want to collect for sorting? What time are your bins or crates usually emptied? Can you fit in with this or do you need to get the waste contractor to do anything different - like change collection days?

4. Check where can waste be collected and sorted

You will need to have an area to spread out waste for sorting. At smaller office sites this may be done at a large table covered with a tarpaulin. For a large building it may be on the basement floor. Think about how you will clean up the sorting site. You may need to wash the area, and this should be into a sewer (trade waste), not storm water. Do the sort somewhere sheltered from the wind, which could upset the scales and blow rubbish everywhere.

5. Know which categories of waste apply to your business

Look in your skip before you do your sort to determine how big it is, how full it is and what is in it. Decide beforehand what categories you want to sort into. Stop sorting after half an hour to check that your categories are appropriate. Take photos of waste as you go (photos are better than remembering) and also take lots of notes. It is a good idea if you have enough people to have one as a 'clean person' for recording and taking photos (this also keeps your camera clean). Nominate one person as the 'decider' on where tricky bits go (eg, are disposable nappies plastic or paper?) If one person answers all these questions you will have more consistency. Nominate one person to read the scales if they are not digital. This again provides more consistency.

6. Ensure you adhere to Health and Safety guidelines

Be aware of hazards on-site and emergency responses/procedures. Be aware that most skips, etc. are open and anyone could put anything in to the skip. Sorters should use gloves and, if possible, aprons. Beware of broken glass and other sharp or gooey objects. Be careful not to lift heavy boxes. You may need a wheelbarrow to move heavy loads.

7. Be ready to complete a waste sort

Protective clothing - especially gloves, mask and safety goggles.

Scales - make sure they are sensitive enough to handle your big and small groups of waste. Electronic scales are preferred because they have less margin for error.

Power supply - you may need power for your scales.

Camera - it is a good idea to take a photo of waste (sorted and unsorted) as a record, and for use in communication with tenants and external publicity. If staff are involved it makes a good story for internal/external newsletters.

Containers to sort into - these can be plastic bins or rubbish bags. Somewhere to put your waste once it is sorted (e.g. recycling bins, skips).

Marker pens - write on your bins what is in them and also the weight of the empty container (they will all be different weights).

Paper to record weights - be clear about whether you are recording the total weight of bin and waste or just the weight of the waste. Also make notes as to what is in each category, and take a photo of it.