



Version 1.0, Feb 2008

Carrying Out a Waste Audit

This checklist is pitched at groups who wish to conduct their own informal audit as a first step to understanding what materials are ending up as waste and how their impact might be cut. It is not a detailed audit for organisations undertaking a formal **Environmental Management System**, <http://eaclink.info/?IEWPV>, process.

Purpose of an audit or review

Do you know how much waste you are producing? Are you aware of how much this waste is costing your organisation? A simple waste audit will help highlight areas for improvement and provide baseline information to measure change against. It will help you to prioritise the most important areas for action. You can use the results as part of your **Sustainable Development Action Plan**, <http://eaclink.info/?BUICE>. Efforts to reduce, re-use, recycle can be part of your commitment to tackling climate change.

The audit process

Getting a clearer picture on your own office practices needn't be an onerous task. A simple 'walk through' review in the office/building is a useful starting point. The person doing it looks at key office practices and observes what materials are ending up in the waste bin. Informal interviews or conversations with staff can provide additional information.

This generally takes less time and effort and provides an opportunity for talking to people about practices and ideas for doing things better. But it might not identify all the wastes generated and might not be representative if it's only done once, or carried out in one department of larger organisations. It provides a 'snapshot' but doesn't gather comprehensive data.

A **waste audit**, <http://eaclink.info/?KKOOT>, is generally a more quantitative process providing data about specific types of waste. It requires commitment, time and effort, including the need to measure waste materials and analyse results to form an action plan with targets and timescales.

A detailed advice note on this is the SEPA Standardised Waste Audit. This is available as a PDF (38 pages) from www.sepa.org.uk. It was originally written for schools but is widely recommended for use by other groups. It has useful guidance and template charts etc for measuring.

Both processes can be backed by looking at the organisation's purchasing (e.g. what is bought, how is this organised, is there an environmental purchasing policy etc)

Who can do a review or audit?

The skills to do this may exist internally or you could approach a sympathetic member of another network with whom you work. Community recycling organisations or local environmental groups may be able to suggest suitable people – it depends on whether you have any budget. Alternatively, you may just want to have an informal internal review to get some better waste management practices in place. This could be organised by the person with responsibility for the office and purchasing, along with other interested individuals as time allows. Or there might be someone willing to do this for you at no-cost/reduced cost or via an 'in-kind' arrangement e.g. a review/audit for a free place at a seminar or annual conference. If you have a budget many consultancies offer waste audits as part of their service. A local 'green business club' or support agency for small businesses or social enterprise are other options.

Getting started

Whatever you're going to do there are four key stages in starting the process:

- Decide what level of process you want
- Decide when you want to do it
- Find someone to help you or gather an internal team
- Acquire the relevant resources

Further information:

SEPA: The Standardised Waste Audit – originally written for schools but is widely recommended for use by other groups. It has useful guidance and template charts etc for measuring. Available as a PDF (38 pages) from <http://www.sepa.org.uk>

Envirowise This is a Government support agency aimed at business but some advice is relevant for larger organisations. Some material is dated (e.g. Green Office Guide) but it has launched a new online tool, 'Words for the Wise' to catalyse sustainable behaviour improvements. See www.envirowise.gov.uk. Envirowise Helpline: 0800 585794

Groundwork Groundwork is an EAC member. Many local Groundwork offices have local partnerships with business support agencies delivering training on spotting opportunities to reduce waste. If you are a larger group you may be eligible. Contact your local Groundwork office.

Global Action Plan GAP is also an EAC Partner and can offer paid-for support. www.GlobalActionPlan.org.uk

Also try your local authority and regional Government Office for local sources of help and information.