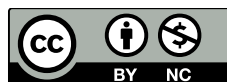


Zero Waste Manual for Schools

From Audit to Action

A manual for students, by students





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The **Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)**—a home-grown institution with headquarters in New Delhi—is among the **world's leading climate think tanks**. The Council uses **data, integrated analysis, and strategic outreach** to support public policy, transform markets, shape technology, and nudge behaviour. It addresses pressing regional and global challenges through an **integrated and internationally focused** approach. The Council prides itself on the **independence** of its high-quality research and strives to **impact sustainable development at scale**.

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About CEEW

INTEGRATED | INTERNATIONAL | INDEPENDENT

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CEEW IN NUMBERS

16 years
16 research teams
400+ team members
680+ peer-reviewed studies

240+ policies & plans informed
80,000+ livelihoods enabled

770+ convenings
800+ opinion articles
52 mn reached via films & documentaries

SELECT POLICY ENGAGEMENTS

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

2011 | National Water Resources Framework
2014 | 175 GW renewables target
2015 | International Solar Alliance
2016 | PM Ujjwala Yojana
2017 | *Saubhagya Scheme*
2019 | India Cooling Action Plan
2021 | Net Zero by 2070
2022 | *Mission LiFE*
2022 | *National Bioenergy Programme*
2022 | E-waste (Management) Rules
2023 | G20 Green Development Pact
2023 | *National Green Hydrogen Mission*
2024 | Green Steel Taxonomy
2024 | *PM Surya Ghar Yojana*
2025 | *National Critical Mineral Mission*
2025 | Rajya Sabha Guidelines on Crop Residue Burning
2025 | India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)
2025 | IFSCA's Framework for Transition Bonds
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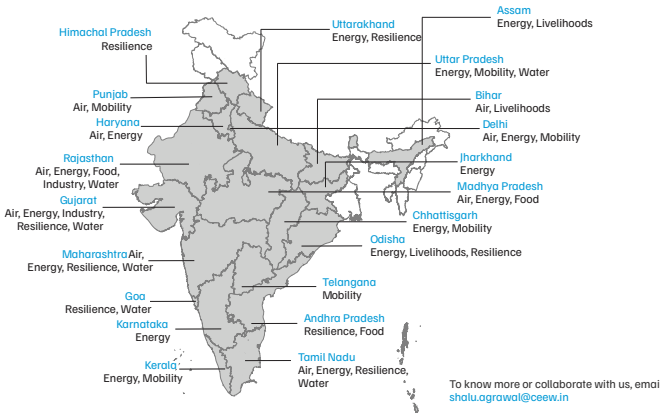
CEEW'S STRATEGIC PILLARS

Clean electricity penetration
Low-carbon industrialisation & circularity
Security of fuels of the future
Quality of life
Green economy & livelihoods
Sharing lessons from India

STATE

2022 | *Rajasthan Organic Farming Mission*
2022 | *Jharkhand State Solar Policy*
2022 | *Uttar Pradesh Vidyut Sakhi programme*
2023 | *Rajasthan Renewable Energy Policy and Green Hydrogen Policy, 2023*
2023 | *Uttarakhand Solar Policy*
2025 | Green Odisha Initiative
2025 | *Maharashtra Climate Action Plan 2.0*
2025 | *Delhi Clean Air Action Plan*
2026 | *Delhi EV Policy 2.0*
2026 | Bihar Promotion of New and Renewable Energy Sources
2026 | Gujarat Integrated Renewable Energy Policy and Green Hydrogen Policy
2026 | *Uttarakhand Mukhyamantri Saur Swarojgar Yojana*
2024-26 | Directives of Commission on Air Quality Management
Net Zero Roadmaps (BH, GJ, TN, UK)
Agroforestry Roadmaps (AS, MH, OD)
140+ Heat Action Plans (GJ, MH, OD, TN)
Treated Used Water Reuse Plans (MH, UP)
Flood Risk Mitigation Plans (GJ, MH)

21 STATES SUPPORTED



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This waste audit manual is the result of a collaborative effort to help schools measure, analyse, and improve their waste management practices. It draws on experiences and lessons from waste audits conducted in schools and was co-created with students to ensure that the suggested activities are practical, engaging, and easy to carry out.

We sincerely thank all the schools that participated in the Zero Waste Schools Programme (2024–25) in Ludhiana and Amritsar. Their enthusiasm, active participation, and willingness to learn and experiment made this manual possible.

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- Sahil Babbar, Co-Founder, Samarthya; and
- Shikha Bedi, Faculty of Social Science, Delhi Public School, Ludhiana

A special thanks to Devasya, a student from Sunbeam School, Mau, Uttar Pradesh, who successfully conducted a waste audit at his school in 2023 with guidance from CEEW. During the launch of the Zero Waste Schools Programme in Ludhiana and Amritsar, he joined virtually to share his experience with the municipal officials, teachers, and students present.

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1. What does it take to become a zero waste school?

Environmental sustainability is becoming an increasingly important issue. Schools play an important role in shaping environmentally responsible behaviour. The teachers, staff, and community members contribute to guiding students by educating them about waste management.

The *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020* makes this an explicit national commitment. It lists 'environmental awareness including water and resource conservation, sanitation and hygiene' among the essential skills every student should acquire, alongside scientific temper, digital literacy, and ethical reasoning (MHRD 2020).

Since 2014, the *Swachh Bharat: Swachh Vidyalaya campaign* has worked to embed cleanliness and hygienic practices in school life, treating schools as sites for both infrastructure improvement and behaviour change among children (PIB 2016).

When the *Swachh Bharat Mission* evolved into the *Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban 2.0*, its information, education, and communication (IEC) strategy explicitly named schools and colleges as sites for promoting good waste-related practices (MoHUA 2021).

While the NEP 2020 asks schools to include environmental awareness and a waste-conscious ethic in what they teach every student, the *Swachh Bharat Mission* encourages schools to turn that awareness into everyday practice. This is where you come in.



Is ‘zero waste’ even possible?

When you hear the phrase ‘zero waste’, you might think it means creating no waste at all. But that’s not possible! All of us consume products and, in the process, generate waste every day. So what does ‘zero waste school’ really mean?

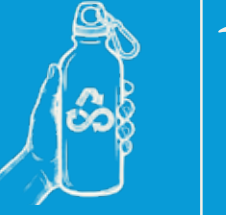
A zero waste school tries to make sure **nothing that could be useful goes to waste.** Anything that can be reduced, reused, recycled, or composted does not get dumped or burnt. This does not mean shifting to zero waste overnight. But a school can keep getting closer to zero waste by making one smart choice at a time. Here are some ways you can contribute →



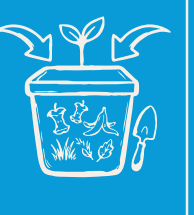
Put waste in the correct bin



Reuse materials (such as newspaper, cardboard, bottle caps) for arts and crafts



Carry a reusable water bottle



Compost food and garden waste



Use both sides of sheets or paper

What is the Zero Waste Schools Programme?

The Zero Waste Schools Programme was born from an idea by young innovators just like you students who wanted to solve the problems of open dumping and burning in their own communities and schools.

The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) launched the Zero Waste Schools Programme with the municipal corporations of Amritsar and Ludhiana in 2024. It is designed for students, by students.

20 schools generated nearly 5000 Kg of waste a month - two-thirds of it could be managed right on campus!



Reflection by students and teachers



“I never realised how much waste we create every day. Now I make sure to separate dry and wet waste at home too! I’m leaving this school and going to a school in Canada I’ll tell them about this process there as well.”

Aarav Khatra
Std 7 student at Sacred Heart Convent School, Ludhiana, Punjab



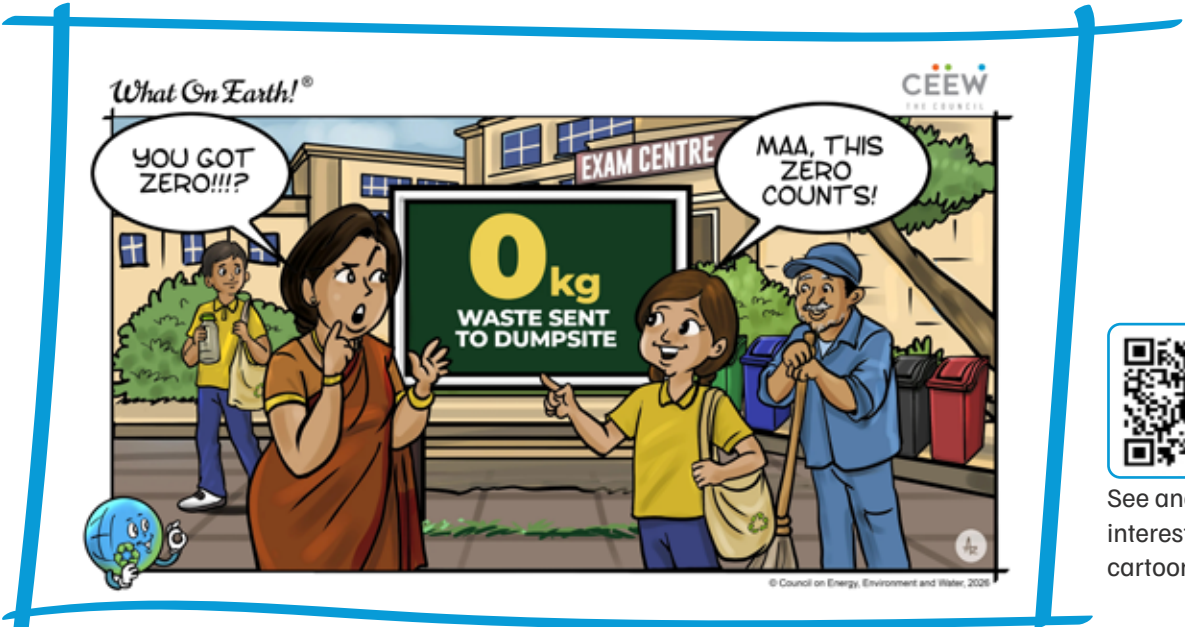
“Through the programme, I learned that small actions like reusing notebooks or carrying steel bottles can make a big difference for our planet.”

Jaspreet Singh
Std 8 student at School of Eminence, Amritsar, Punjab



“The audit helped our students understand waste as a resource. It’s inspiring to see them take ownership of keeping the school clean and sustainable.”

Harjeet Kaur
Teacher at SDP Model School, Ludhiana, Punjab



See and use interesting cartoons here.

Source: CEEW. 2026.



2. About this Manual

Developed and tested through the Zero Waste Schools Programme (2024–25), this waste audit manual brings together experiences from Ludhiana and Amritsar, Punjab, with the participation of students, teachers, and school support staff. We have designed this manual to help schools improve waste management practices.



The Zero Waste Schools Programme in numbers

Initiated in

20 schools

across Amritsar and Ludhiana, Punjab

Involved

300+

Students

50+

Teachers

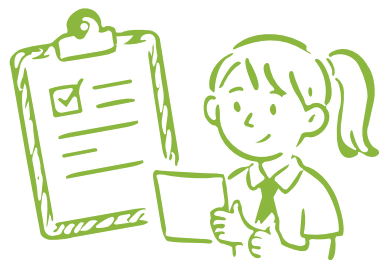
50

School Support

This manual is for you if...

- you are a student in middle school and you are ready to champion better waste management practices in school and at home;
- you are a teacher or supervisor who wants to facilitate tried and tested activities related to waste management; or
- you are a member of the school community who cares about what happens to waste that is generated.

Teachers and supervisors, it is up to you to guide your students through each step. Look out for the tip boxes, teacher and student’s icon throughout this manual for extra guidance:



For Teachers

Guidance and Tips, addressed to the teacher



For Students

Challenges and activities, addressed to the student



Try this!

For quick activities



Pause and reflect



Challenge Accepted



Things to keep in mind

As part of the Zero Waste Schools Programme, you will...



Develop the practical skills of mapping, handling, sorting, and measuring waste in a safe and systematic manner.



Discover how waste is generated and handled, and the impact it has on people and the environment.



Strengthen your teamwork and problem-solving skills and take responsibility for improving waste management practices in school and at home.



Learn about the different types of waste your school generates and how each can be reduced, reused, or recycled.

Why audit waste?

When waste is not collected properly, it is often poorly managed and dumped at illegal sites



This pollutes the soil, and blocks drainage channels leading to flooding.



Open burning is common, contributing to air pollution and affecting people's health. (Ogunkunle et al. 2026)



Young leaders can bring change and take action, beginning with a waste audit. What gets measured, gets managed!



School campuses produce a variety of waste from many sources...



Once we know where our waste comes from we can take actions such as: composting food waste, encouraging reusing the items. With clear data, an effective new waste system could make school clean and landfill clear.



Let's begin our zero waste journey!

Activity 1: Creating zero waste heroes

But to understand it, we must first measure and sort! **Our waste audit identifies where waste exactly comes from.**



Scan the QR and play the video to begin your journey of creating zero waste heroes

Activity 2: Where does it all go?

For Teachers

Help your students connect their daily observations about waste to the environmental issues occurring around them.



1. Begin with a classroom discussion. Present the following scenario to your students:

Every day, our school throws things away – food scraps, paper, wrappers, and old pencils. Where does all of this go?

Encourage as many students as possible to share their ideas. Write their responses on the blackboard.

2. Read the story on the right side page first to the study about Greenbeam School, where four students noticed that waste had become a big problem on campus. After you have read the story, ask your students these questions:

- Could something similar be happening at our school?
- What waste-related problems have you noticed?
- How can we work together to find solutions?

Use the discussion to introduce the idea that a waste audit is the first step towards understanding and improving how waste is managed in schools.



Key messages to reinforce:

Waste should not be treated as an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ problem. Every piece of waste has a journey, and understanding that journey can help us reduce waste and ensure a cleaner, greener school.

The Story Of Greenbeam School

The students at Greenbeam School noticed that something seemed off about the waste in their school. But what was the problem? And how did they solve it? Read on to find out!

It was a lively afternoon at the Greenbeam School canteen. In one corner, four friends – Riya, Kabir, Tanu, and Dev – were finishing their lunch. When they got up to return their plates, they saw the cleaning staff clearing trays piled with untouched vegetables, half-eaten rotis, and fruit peels.

Riya frowned, “There’s so much food being thrown away! Where does it all go?”

Kabir shrugged, “It must get taken away.”

Tanu crossed her arms, “Away? Where to? And isn’t it just... wasteful? My mother always says food should never be thrown out.”

Curious, the four friends decided to investigate. They followed the path from the canteen to the back of the school and stopped short. There were piles of food waste in the open, with flies buzzing all over. Beside this were heaps of crumpled worksheets, used chart paper, and plastic wrappers overflowing from a bin. The whole place reeked.

Dev pointed, “Look! Even the paper bin is full of food-soiled sheets and chips packets. Do we really use that much paper and plastic every single day?”

Kabir picked up a half-burnt plastic wrapper lying on the ground. “Why is this burnt? Did someone set it on fire?”

The four friends looked at each other, unsettled. They had never thought about what happened after they dropped something into a bin. Now they realised that it didn’t just disappear.

Later that afternoon, they brought up their concern with Hathi Sir, their cheerful environmental studies teacher.

Riya spoke first. “Rakesh Sir! We saw how much food and paper are wasted at school. And behind the school, there was so much waste just lying around. Some of it had even been burnt. Is there anything we can do about it?”

Hathi Sir smiled ruefully, “Ah, you have found the school’s hidden problem and its hidden treasure.”



Confused, Dev said, “Treasure? You mean to say waste is treasure?”

“Exactly,” said Rakesh Sir. “Waste may look useless, but it tells us stories about what we use, what we throw away, and what we can change. But first, let me ask you this: do you know what happens to most of the waste in our city?”

The students shook their heads.

Rakesh Sir said, “Let me show you the bigger picture.”

He pulled out his mobile and showed them a few images and shared some facts: “In India, we generate over 62 million tonnes of waste every year. Only about 61 per cent of the collected waste is treated (CPCB 2023). The rest? It piles up in landfills. These are massive dumping grounds, some as tall as buildings. They release poisonous gases and leachate into the air, soil, and water around them. In many neighbourhoods, including ones near our school, waste is burnt. This releases toxic smoke that can cause asthma, lung diseases, and even cancer.”

The students had seen this – there was often smoke rising from waste piles near their homes.

Rakesh Sir continued, “If waste is not managed properly, it could become a major source of air pollution very soon. It also chokes our drains, which is what leads to floods during the monsoons.”

The students remembered the previous monsoon, when water had flooded the streets outside their houses.

“It also harms animals. Cows, dogs, and birds eat plastic waste from garbage piles and die painful deaths,” Rakesh Sir said, his voice growing serious. “This is not just a school problem. It impacts our health, our environment, and our future. And as we generate more and more waste, it will only get worse.”



The students sat in stunned silence.

Tanu spoke quietly, “So, when we throw something ‘away,’ there is no ‘away’?”

Rakesh Sir nodded, “Yes. “Away” is always somewhere. And that is usually our soil, our water, or our air.”

Riya looked determined, “Then we have to do something! But where do we even start?”

“You’ve already started,” Rakesh Sir said, “By noticing. By asking questions.”

Dev’s eyes widened. “So it’s possible? We really can make a difference?” “Absolutely,” said Rakesh Sir. “But first, we need to know what is going on in our own school. What do we throw away? How much waste do we generate? Where does it come from? To find that out, we need to conduct a...” – he turned to the blackboard and wrote “Waste Audit.”

Kabir perked up, “Like an investigation?”

Rakesh Sir beamed, “Yes, conducting a waste audit is like being a detective. You’ll sort through our school’s waste safely, with gloves and masks, and find out what’s in it. How much food, plastic, and paper gets discarded. Where it comes from – the canteen, classrooms, or staff rooms. Once we have this data, we can show it to the school principal, other teachers, and even the municipal corporation: “This is our problem, and here is our proof. And here is our plan to fix it.”

Tanu grinned, “So we can become waste detectives!”

Riya nodded, “And we can use what we find to save our school.”

Rakesh Sir added to the board, “Mission: Waste Audit.”

The students cheered. Their investigation had begun!



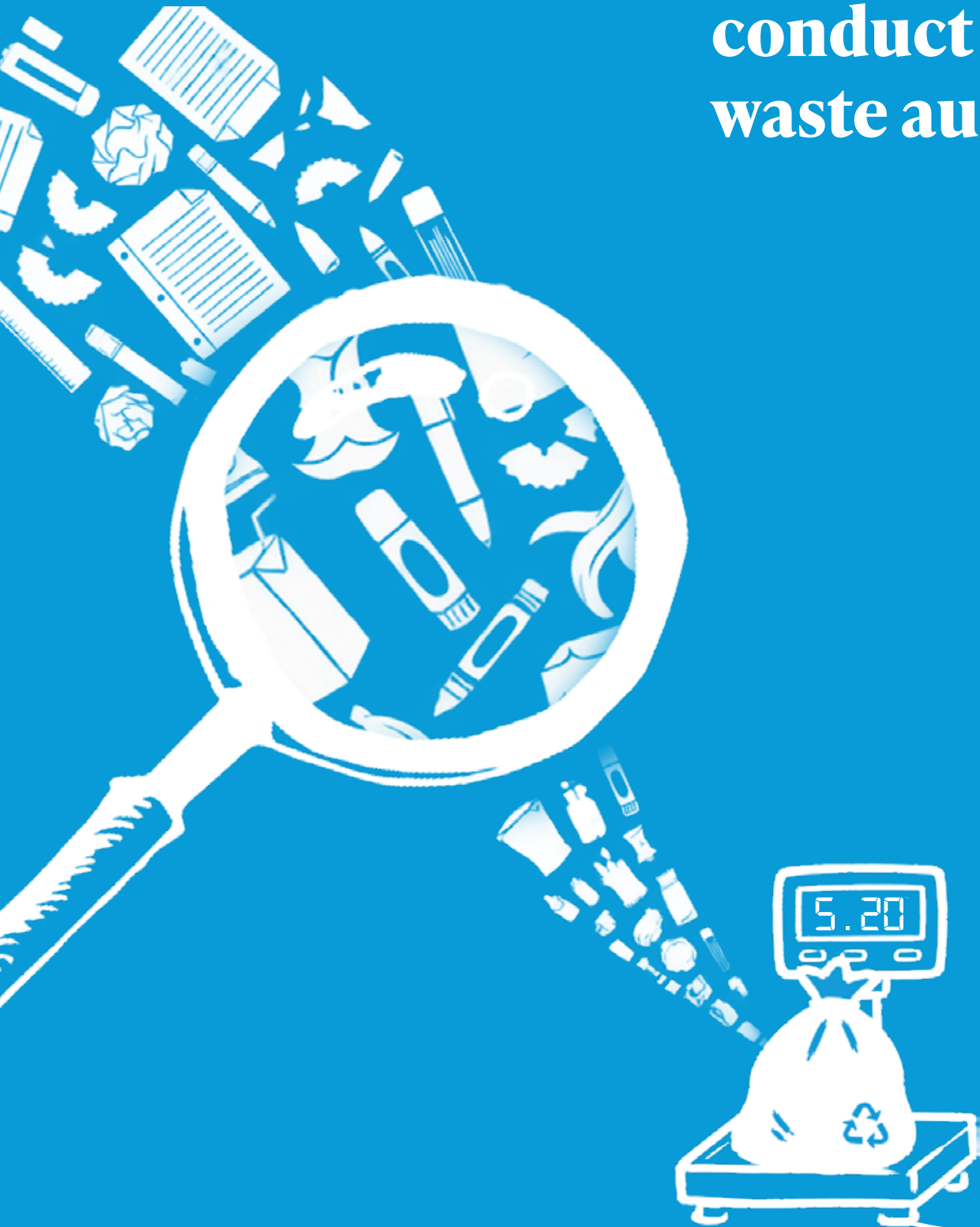
‘Pause and reflect’

Now it’s your turn to conduct a waste audit in your school. But before you start investigating, consider these questions:

- Is anything from the Greenbeam School story true in your school?
- Why should you care about waste?
- Why is a waste audit important?
- How can you make a difference?

By the end of the waste audit, you will be able to answer these questions, armed with real data from your own school.

3. Let's conduct a waste audit!



Mission

To make your school a zero waste institution by conducting a waste audit.

Motivation

A waste audit will help you discover:

- how much waste your school generates;
- the types of waste; and
- the sources of waste.

The information you collect will help your school make better waste management decisions. You will be able to identify ways to reduce waste, reuse materials, and recycle or compost. The waste audit will also indicate where your school can improve and help measure its progress over time.



Make sure you have

- Participants:** Students, teachers, and school support staff must come together for this.
- A schedule:** The process will unfold in four stages: Stage 1 (0.75 hours), Stage 2 (2–3 hours), Stage 3 (1–1.5 hours), and Stage 4 (hours).
- Materials:** Gather the following materials before you begin.

 Personal protective equipment (PPE), including reusable gloves (gardening or dishwashing), masks, and shoe covers	 Waste segregation categories reference sheets (see Annexure 1)	 Laptops/Waste audit information sheets (see Annexure 6) for data input and analysis	
 Worksheets and clipboards	 Weighing scale with a rated load of 100 kg	 Large waterproof sheets or tarps	 Tongs and shovels
 Large sorting boxes/bags/bins: to accommodate the school's waste for an entire day	 Mobile camera/Digital notepads to document every step taken before, during, and after the audit	 Storage/Sorting area for recyclable materials	
 School enrolment data (see Annexure 4)	 First aid kits, hand sanitiser, and drinking water	 Tables	 Chairs or benches



Things to keep in mind

Set the groundwork before audit day so that everything runs smoothly and safely when your students begin.

Obtain permissions and approvals

- Distribute and collect signed parental consent forms, including a health declaration (see the sample form in Annexure 5).
- Guide students to obtain approval from the school principal to conduct the audit.

Plan the audit

- Walk around campus with the waste audit team and map the location, number, and size of each bin.
- Decide whether to conduct a whole school audit or a partial school audit – consider the size of the school, student population, and available time.

Assign roles

- Divide the waste audit roles fairly among the students. (See Annexure 2 for student roles to be assigned.)
- Encourage inclusive participation and shared responsibility.

Prepare the school community

- Assist the waste audit team with explaining the purpose of the audit to other teachers, students, and school support staff.
- Coordinate with the school support staff the day before the audit – ask them not to dispose of waste, to put bags in all bins, and to store the collected waste safely.

Arrange materials

- Help the waste audit team organise the materials needed for the audit.
- Find alternative solutions if some materials are not available. For instance:
 - » Take the segregated waste to a nearby scrap dealer (*raddiwala*) to get it weighed if appropriate weighing scales are unavailable.
 - » Segregate waste using labelled bags if bins are in short supply.
 - » Use kitchen tongs or share tongs among students if there are too few.

Keep everyone safe

- Provide reusable gloves and masks.
- Make sure all waste sorters and weighers wear gloves and closed shoes.
- Prevent direct contact with special care waste – always use tongs to handle broken, sharp, or hazardous items. Annexure 1 details waste segregation categories and corresponding examples.

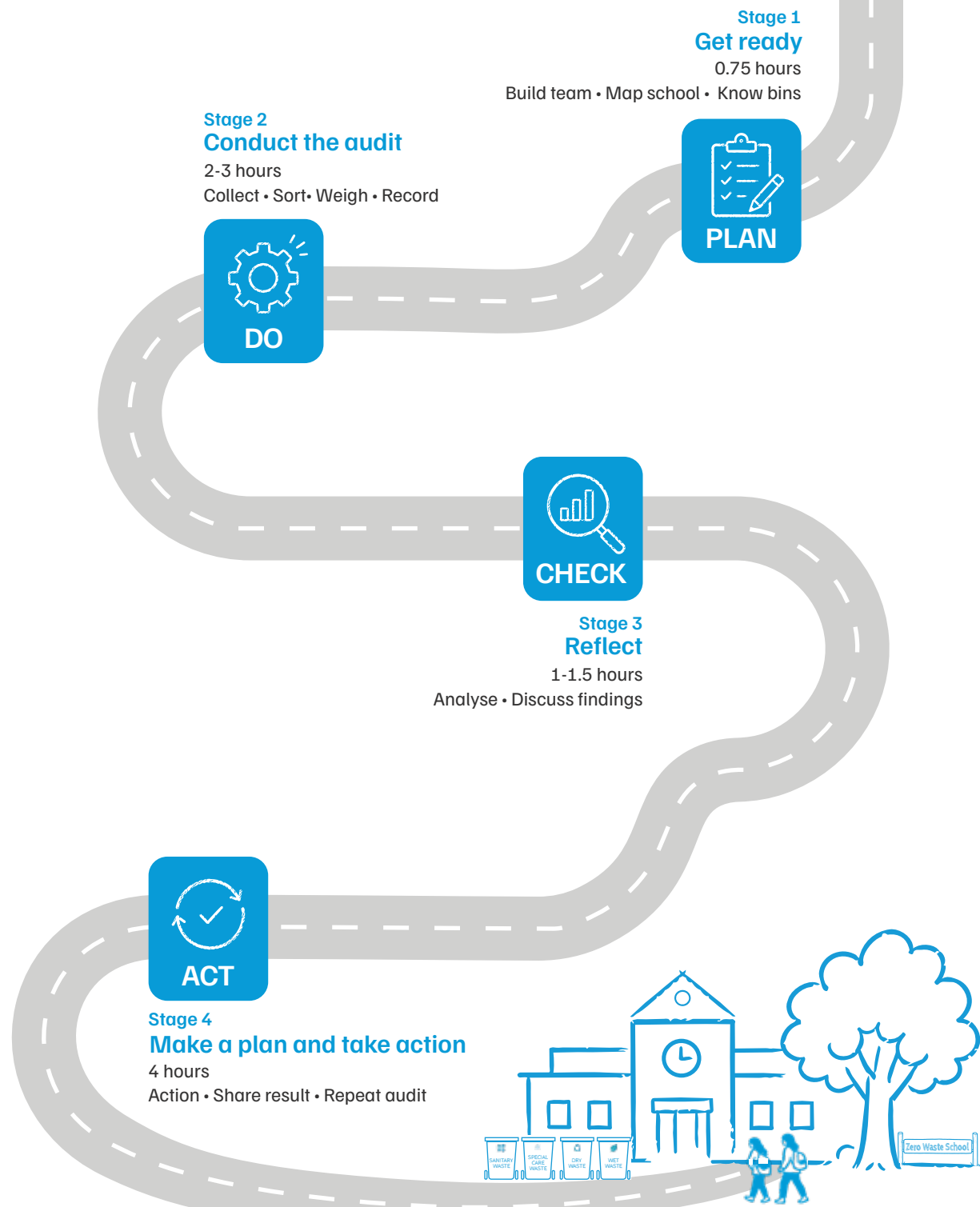
Create a positive environment

- Maintain discipline and order throughout the audit.
- Encourage teamwork, respect, and responsible behaviour at all times.



Mission map

Your waste audit mission will happen in four stages. Here is a mission map of the process:



Source: Authors' compilation.

Stage 1: Get ready

Step 1.1 Pick the perfect day

A good waste audit starts with clear planning. Here are things to keep in mind when planning out the audit day:

- Collect waste on a regular school day when most students are present; conduct the waste audit the next day using the waste collected.
- Choose a day with a dry forecast.
- Plan for the audit to take place between Tuesday and Saturday.
- Avoid half-days, rainy or extreme-weather days, and Mondays.



Step 1.2 Assemble a team



CEEW team member explaining about waste audit to the school students before the audit.

Every investigation needs a great team. Here's how to build yours:

- Recruit at least 10 students, 1 teacher, and 2–3 school support staff. The more participants, the better! If your school has more than 1,000 students, split up into two or more teams and cover different parts of campus.
- Hold a pre-audit meeting. Get the whole team together and discuss what you already know: how many students there are, where the bins are, and how waste is currently handled in your school.
- Give your team a creative name.



Try this!

Brainstorm with your team for five minutes to come up with at least three names. Then vote to choose the best one (such as Audit Avengers, Eco Ninjas, Bin Detectives).

- Assign a role to each team member. Use Table 1, and wear your role label on audit day (Annexure 2) so it is clear who is doing what.

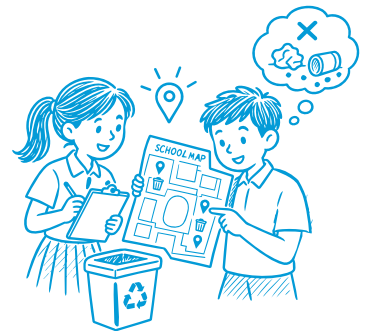
Table 1. Waste audit team roles

S. No.	Role	What needs to be done?	Who's on it?
1	 Sorter	Sort the waste into labelled boxes or bags by type – paper, plastic, metal, food, garden, and more.	
2	 Weigher	Place each sorted pile on a weighing scale and read out the weight.	
3	 Scribe	Write down everything: the waste type, its weight, and where it came from.	
4	 Analyst	Calculate the weight of the waste generated.	
5	 Recorder	Document the whole mission from start to finish.	
6	 Supervisor	Guide the team, help keep everyone safe, and make sure every step is followed.	
7	 School support staff	Help students collect, sort, and weigh the waste.	

Step 1.3 Explore your school

Before you can fix a problem, you need to observe and understand it. Take a walk around your school and find every place where waste is generated and stored.

- Walk through the classrooms, corridors, canteen, staff rooms, gardens, and playground.
- Find all bins and mark their locations on a school map.
- Look out for spots where waste piles up but with no bin nearby. Keep an eye out for easily overlooked waste, such as printer cartridges.

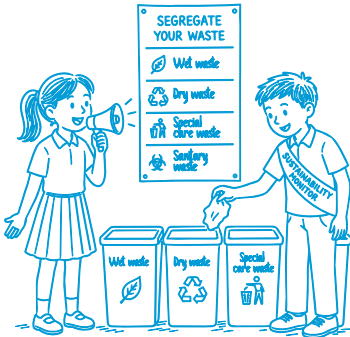


Pause and reflect

Close your eyes for 30 seconds. Picture a place in school where you saw waste lying around. What did you see? Share your reflection for one minute with a partner, then share with the whole team.

A waste audit works best if everyone in the school community segregate waste at source correctly – spread the word before the audit day to get people on the same page.

- Ask your teacher to appoint a sustainability monitor in your classroom to encourage your classmates to dispose of waste in the correct bins.
- Ensure school-wide awareness by making an announcement during the morning assembly or by putting up segregation charts next to every bin.



Waste segregation chart



Source: Authors' compilation based on Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026.
Note: For a printable version, please see 'Annexure 1.'

Challenge accepted

Look inside five bins at your school. Does any bin have the wrong waste sitting in it? Note down what you find – you will need this information for Stage 3.



Stage 2: Conduct the audit

A. Day before the waste audit

Step 2.1 Locate and label every bin

- Work with the school support staff to locate and label every bin on campus. Note the bin colours (blue, green, black, or red) and how many bins there are.

Step 2.2 Instruct the school support staff

Take the school support staff through all the audit steps, making sure they understand each one.

- Remind them about the date of the waste audit.
- Urge them not to dispose of any waste the day before, as it is needed for the audit.
- Find out how and when the bins normally get emptied.
- Identify any waste that should be recorded but not physically sorted. For example, sanitary waste and laboratory chemical waste should never be handled directly.
- Ask the school support staff to put a fresh bag in every bin.
- Inform them about any changes to the audit plan.



Student writing labels for the waste audit day



Things to keep in mind

- The audit is done for the waste generated on one day of school.
- Collect the waste from all bins generated on that day. Bags can be used to make collection easier.

Step 2.3 Collect and store the waste

- Collect the waste from all bins in bags.
- Label all bags according to the source – classroom, canteen, garden, staff room, washroom, and admin office (use these and the other labels given in Annexure 3) – and keep them separate.
- Store all bags in a shaded area away from rain and animals until the audit.



Step 2.4 Set up a sorting area

- Pick a place away from classrooms and learning spaces. Make sure it is shaded, well-ventilated, well-lit, and sheltered from the wind, which could blow the waste around.
- Spread a large waterproof sheet or tarp on the ground so that the waste does not mix with the soil or contaminate concrete/tile flooring.
- Set up seating – chairs or benches – and tables for your team.
- Place the audit materials on a table.
- Ensure there is drinking water for your team.



Students learning about waste segregation, sorting and weighing steps during the waste audit.

B. Waste audit day

Step 2.5 Organise the sorting area, materials, and collected waste

- Hand out PPE (gloves, masks, and shoe covers) and hand sanitiser to every team member.
- Ensure everyone is wearing closed shoes.
- Encourage team members to follow safety instructions before, during, and after the audit.
- Label all boxes/bags/bins according to the waste type, e.g., paper and plastic, to enable sorting for the waste audit.
- Place the weighing scale next to the sorting tarp.
- Print out a waste audit information sheet (Annexure 6) or draw Table 2 on a whiteboard to record weights by waste type and source.
- Bring all the waste your team collected the previous day to the sorting area



Things to keep in mind

- Follow every step and enforce all safety guidelines.
- Request the school support staff to check for and remove hazardous items (such as broken glass, blades, and needles) before your students begin sorting.
- Confirm that every student is wearing their PPE correctly.
- Remind students never to touch the waste with their bare hands or touch their faces during the audit.
- Guide the sorters and weighers through the process of sorting the waste.
- Help the scribe record the weight and source of the waste accurately.

Step 2.6 Spread out the waste

- Empty one box/bag at a time according to its source so that sorting and measuring remain easy and accurate.
- Use shovels to spread the waste out on the waterproof sheet or tarp, with the help of school support staff.



Spreading the collected waste on the tarp to start the audit

Step 2.7 Sort the waste

- Wear gloves and use tongs when sorting the waste.
- Sort the waste according to type – paper, plastic, garden, food, metal, sanitary, and so on – and put it into labelled boxes/bags.



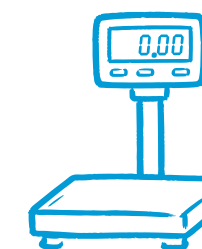
Things to keep in mind

Rules for sorting: DOs and DON'Ts

- ✓ DO wear your PPE properly during the whole waste audit.
- ✓ DO keep waste at ground level; never throw it or pass it over another student's head.
- ✓ DO ask your supervisor and sorters to double-check that every item is going into the right bag.
- ✓ DO sanitise your hands and gloves after sorting and weighing the waste.
- ✗ DON'T walk across a floor or tarp that is covered in waste.
- ✗ DON'T touch any waste with your bare hands.
- ✗ DON'T handle hazardous materials – broken glass, needles, or blades

Step 2.8 Weigh the waste

- Weigh each category of waste separately and record your observations.
- Weigh each box/bag when it is about half full. Never weigh a full or overflowing container.
- If you are the weigher, call out the category, weight, and source to the scribe.



Step 2.9 Record it

- If you are the scribe, record every observation on a whiteboard or on paper (Annexure 6A provides a blank template and Annexure 6B shows a filled-in example).



Table 2. Waste audit calculations

Audit date	
Audit start and end time	
Season	
Audit duration	
Name of teacher/supervisor	
Name of school support staff	
Weight of the empty box/bag (kg) (for example, if your full bag weighs 12 kg and the empty bag weighs 0.5 kg, the waste itself weighs 11.5 kg)	

Note: For a printable version, please see 'Annexure 6.'

S. No.	Type of waste	Type of bag/box	Weight of the empty bag/box (kg)	Total weight of waste in the bag/box (kg)	Weight of the waste alone kg) = total weight of waste in the box/bag – weight of the empty bag/box (kg)	Sources of waste
1	Paper					
2	Plastic					
3	Food					
4	Metal (aluminium foil, steel spoon, etc.)					
5	Horticultural/Garden					
6	Special care waste					
7	Sanitary waste					
8	Other (soiled/mixed waste that is difficult to sort)					
	Total					

Note: Please add more rows depending on the number of bags/boxes used for each category of waste.

Note: For a printable version, please see 'Annexure 6.'



Things to keep in mind

- Wear gloves and masks throughout the audit.
- Avoid eating while conducting the audit.
- Drink water regularly throughout the day.
- Let the trained school support staff handle the bathroom (sanitary waste) for hygiene reasons.
- Make sure there is hand sanitiser available at the sorting area.
- Ensure that there is a first aid kit and an eyewash station nearby and make sure there is a trained first aider (often your supervisor) on the team.
- Clean and dry all tools and equipment after the audit to prevent issues like rusting.



You’ve now collected the evidence. Next, you’ll analyse what the data tells you about your school’s waste!

C. After the waste audit

Step 2.10 Analyse your data

During the analysis, you will turn numbers into insights. Your calculations will help you understand how much waste your school generates.

- Add up the weights of each waste type (paper, plastic, food, metal, horticultural/garden, special care, sanitary, and others) and calculate the total waste generated.



Students doing the calculations of the generated waste after the waste audit



You’ve collected and analysed your data. Now it’s time to think about what it tells you.

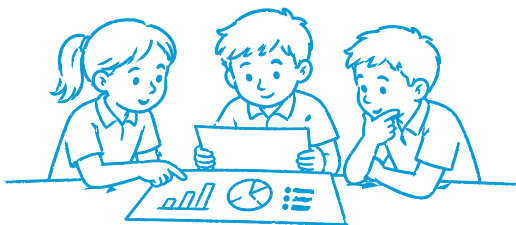
Stage 3: Reflect

This is where the principle ‘what gets measured gets managed’ comes in.

Gather your team and go through your data. Look at the numbers and consider the following questions:

- Which type of waste did your school generate the most of?
- Where did most of it come from?
- If your school generates waste at the same rate throughout the year, how much waste would it produce? Multiply the total by the average number of days your school operates in a year.
- Look back at what you found inside the bins. What did this activity help you notice about how waste is segregated at your school?

Which area of the school needs the most improvement? Brainstorm together to determine where things could improve.



Pause and reflect

What did you expect to find before conducting the audit? What did the audit reveal? Were there any surprises?



Things to keep in mind

- Supervise the clean-up process. Ensure that all equipment (tarps and tongs) is cleaned/disinfected, and the audit area is swept and mopped.
- Ensure that all students sanitise and wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Assist the student analyst in calculating the total weight of the generated waste and categorising the data to identify waste trends and major sources of waste generation.
- Gather the students to discuss your findings. Ask them what they expected to find versus what they actually found. Have them reflect on which items could easily be diverted from landfills. Ask questions such as: How did conducting the audit change your understanding of the waste your school generates?
- Brainstorm with students about areas for improvement and help them create a tailored waste management action plan for your school, focusing on the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle).

Stage 4 Make a plan and take action

- Plan how you will share the waste audit results with the school community. For instance, discuss the audit results during the morning assembly, put up a poster on the notice board, include them in annual reports, or give a presentation at a school function.
- Use the waste audit results to develop a specific waste management action plan for your school. Take a look at the waste management action plan template provided in Annexure 7. Choose strategies to fix the identified problems.
- Adopt the 3Rs – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – to move your school towards zero waste. You can also read about the 9Rs: Refuse, Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Refurbish, Remanufacture, Repurpose, Recycle, and Recover.
- After implementing the waste management action plan in your school, repeat the waste audit to determine how much waste has been reduced or diverted from landfills and whether the objectives of your plan were achieved.



Explaining waste management action plan for implementation in the school post waste audit



Things to keep in mind

Conduct the waste audit monthly, quarterly, or following special events. Repeating it across seasons will help you understand your school’s waste generation patterns throughout the year.

Mission complete!



- You built a team, obtained permission, scouted your school, and conducted a full waste audit.
- You turned waste into data, and data into an action plan.
- Keep measuring, keep improving, and keep your school moving toward zero waste.

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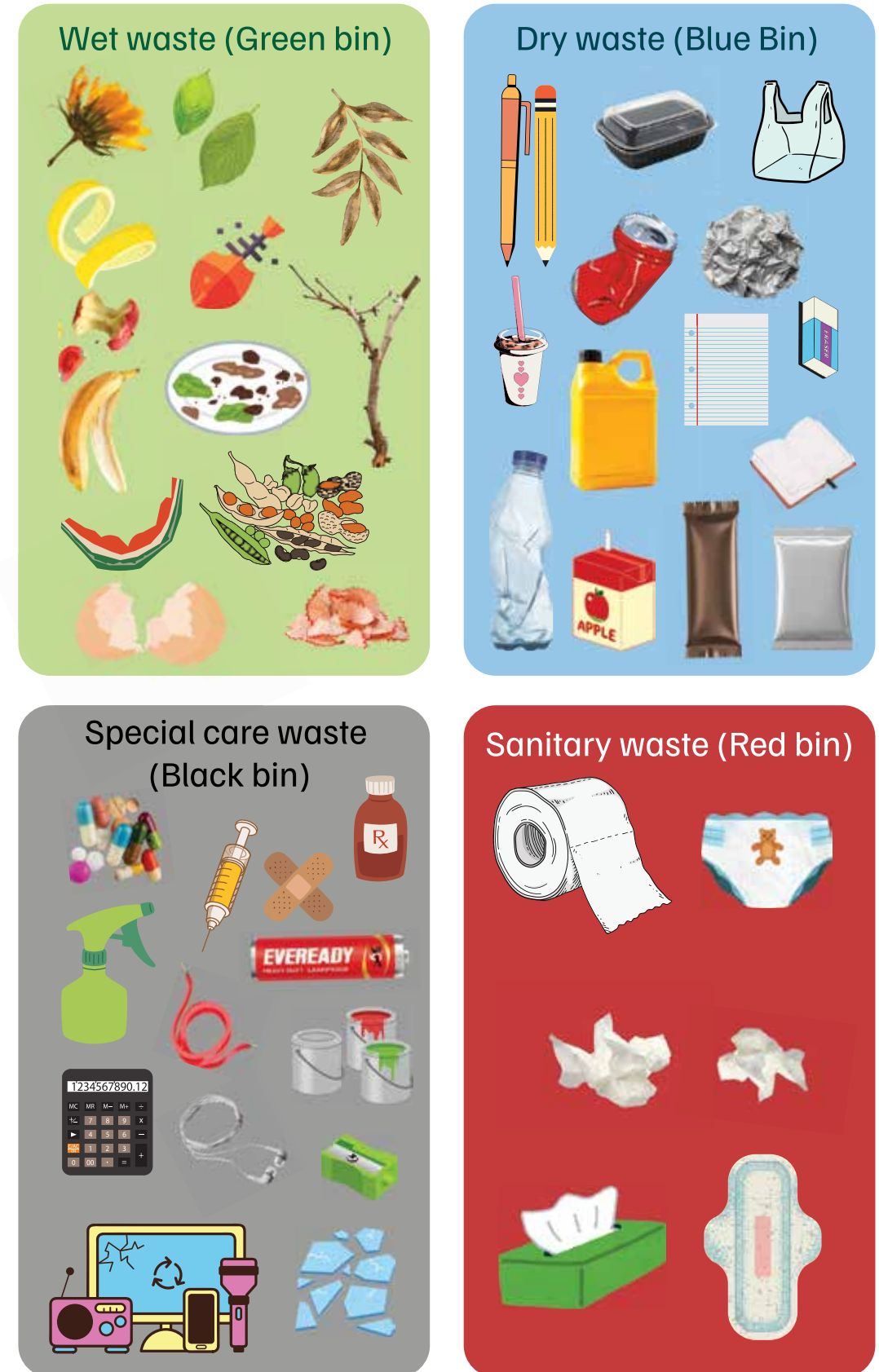
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Helpful resources

Annexure 1. Waste segregation categories

Wet waste (green)	Dry waste (blue)	Special care waste (black)	Sanitary waste (red)
Fruit and vegetable peels	Chocolate wrappers/ milk sachets/ multi-layer plastic packaging like Lays packets	Mosquito repellent refill bottles/ insecticide sprays/ pest killers/ spray cans	Cotton/ tissue papers used for medical purposes
Rotten, expired bread, biscuits and other food items and leftover food	Empty shampoo/ perfume/ deodorants/ shaving creams bottles/ used toothbrush and paste tubes, etc.	Expired medicines/ tablet covers / syrup bottles	Sanitary Waste
Used tea/tea bags/ coffee ground	Styrofoam	Empty cans of lubricants used for vehicles	Sanitary napkins
Egg shells	Broken household plastic items / and toys	Used razor/razor blades	Children's diapers
Coconut shells (including tender coconut shell)	Old brooms, used mop cloth and door mats	Old batteries	
Mango kernel & any seed	Metal tins and cans (e.g. Pepsi, Coke cans), Pieces of aluminium foil	Fused bulbs/ tubes/ electrical items/	
Coconut fibre	Newspapers/ cardboards/ tetrapacks	Broken glasses/ ceramics	
Used flowers / dry flowers	Small tubs used for yoghurt, cheese, jam	Expired cosmetics	
Floor sweeping dust	Polythene covers / plastic covers	Empty cans of toilet cleaners/ old paints / old household chemicals/ cleaners	
Meat & non-veg remains	PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) soft drink / water bottles	Cotton/ tissue papers used for medical purposes	
Hair	Broken stationery like used pens, pencil sharpeners	Rusted iron pieces	
Garden shrubs	Leather, rubber	Old printer cartridge / CDs	

Waste segregation chart



Annexure 2. Role sheet for the waste audit

Print this page, cut or tear out the labels, and attach them to participants using a safety pin or tape during the waste audit.

Sorter	Sorter
Sorter	Sorter
Sorter	Sorter
Sorter	Sorter
Weigher	Weigher
Analyst	Weigher
Recorder	Scribe
Supervisor	School Support Staff

Annexure 3. Labels for the waste sources

Write the other sources of waste generation (if any) in the blank columns.

Classroom	Canteen
Kitchen	Library
Staff Room	Office
Corridor	Garden
laboratory	Art Room
Ground	Washroom
Admin Office	Computer Lab

Annexure 4. School details

School Details	
School name	
Address	
City/Town	
Zip code	
Principal name	
Principal contact details	
Year of data provided	
Total no. of students	
No. of female students	
No. of male students	
No. of other students	
No. of teaching staff (female)	
No. of teaching staff (male)	
No. of non-teaching staff (female)	
No. of non-teaching staff (male)	

Annexure 5. Parental consent form

This form is a template for reference; schools can customise it as per their needs.

Parental consent form: Zero Waste Schools Programme waste audit

We are excited to invite students to participate in the Zero Waste Schools Programme! The programme empowers students to create a more sustainable school environment. A key part of this is the waste audit.

What is the waste audit?

The waste audit is an engaging, hands-on activity that enables students to examine the types and quantities of waste generated within the school. Through this process, they collect and analyse data, and collaboratively develop ideas and strategies to reduce waste and promote sustainable practices. The waste audit supports practical learning while promoting a cleaner school environment.

What will your child do?

Your child may be involved in activities such as:

- observing and recording waste generation in different areas of the school (such as classrooms and the canteen).
- sorting and classifying waste into categories (such as paper, plastic, and food).
- measuring and recording the quantity of waste collected.
- analysing the findings and discussing possible solutions with peers.

Be part of the solution

By participating in the waste audit, students will build practical skills in handling, sorting, and analysing waste, while also developing their problem-solving, teamwork, and critical thinking abilities. The activity will foster environmental awareness and encourage sustainable practices.

We value your consent

Please review the following information and sign to grant permission for your child to participate in the Zero Waste Schools Programme waste audit.

Consent

I give permission for my child, _____, to participate in the Zero Waste Schools Programme, specifically in the waste audit. I understand that this activity involves handling waste materials and that all reasonable precautions will be taken to ensure the safety of participants.

Student name: _____

Grade level: _____

School name: _____

Parent/Guardian name: _____

Health declaration

I confirm that my child is medically fit to participate in the waste audit activities. I will inform the school/organisers of any medical conditions, allergies, or sensitivities that may require special attention during the programme. I understand that it is my responsibility to inform the school/organisers of any changes to my child’s health that may affect their participation.

Signature:

Date:

Contact information:

If you have any questions about the Zero Waste Schools Programme or the waste audit, please contact _____.

Annexure 6. Waste audit information sheet

A. Waste audit calculations

Audit date	
Audit start and end time	
Season	
Audit duration	
Name of teacher/supervisor	
Name of school support staff	
Weight of the empty box/bag (kg) (for example, if your full bag weighs 1.2 kg and the empty bag weighs 0.5 kg, the waste itself weighs 11.5 kg)	

S. No.	Type of waste	Type of container/ bag/box	Weight of the empty bag/box (kg)	Total weight of waste in the bag/box (kg)	Weight of the waste alone kg) = total weight of waste in the box/bag – weight of the empty bag/box (kg)	Sources of waste
1	Paper					
2	Plastic					
3	Food					
4	Metal (aluminium foil, steel spoon, etc.)					
5	Horticultural/Garden					
6	Special care waste					
7	Sanitary waste					
8	Other (soiled/mixed waste that is difficult to sort)					
	Total					

Note: Please add more rows depending on the number of bags/boxes used for each category of waste.

Waste audit team details					
	Role	Name	Gender	Class	Section
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

Teacher/Supervisor and school support staff details	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

	Representatives from other entities	Designation
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

B. Prefilled waste audit data (for reference)



WASTE AUDIT						
				Audit Date 06.04.2025		
School Name				Sri Guru Hari Krishna School		
Audit Time				Prep Time: (8:45-9:40) 10:00-12:00		
Audit duration				2 hours		
POC				Manmeet Sandhu		
Janitor staff				NARESH		
S. No	Type of Waste	Container	Weight of Container (kg)	Total Weight of Waste (kg)	Weight of Waste (kg)	Source of Waste
1	Plastic	Box	0.08	1.780	1.700	Classroom
		Box		2.370	0.59	Canteen
2	Paper	Box	0.08	4.600	4.52	Classroom
				5.080	0.48	Canteen
3	Food waste	Box	0.08	1.360	1.28	Classroom
4	Metal waste (Aluminium)	Box	0.08	0.320	0.240	Classroom
				0.430	0.110	Canteen
5	Garden Waste	Bin	3.440	8.160	4.720	Garden
6	Other waste	Bin	7.110	14.280	7.17	Classroom
		Box	0.08	1.870	1.79	Classroom
				1.890	0.02	Canteen
7	Domestic Hazardous	Box	0.08	0.420	0.340	
7	Sanitary Waste Stationery			0.130		Classroom
				0.320	0.320	Canteen
TOTAL					23.28	

Annexure 7. Waste management action plan

ZERO WASTE Schools Programme

Waste Audit					
	Role	Name	Gender	Class	Section
1	Analyst	Gurdeep Singh	M	8 th	B
2	Weighter	Harshdeep Singh	M	8 th	C
3	Weighter	Harshdeep Singh	M	8 th	A
4	Sorter	Agamdeep Singh	M	8 th	C
5	Sorter	Abhijot Singh	M	8 th	A
6	Sorter	Anshu Singh	M	8 th	C
7	Sorter	Anshu Singh	F	8 th	C
8	Sorter	Sachmeet Kaur	F	8 th	A
9	Sorter	Jasleen Kaur	F	8 th	A
10	Observer	Parasdeep Singh	M	8 th	A
11					
12					

	CEEW Representative Name
1	Adeel Khan
2	Smriti Mishra
3	Narendran S
4	Santhak
5	

	Municipal Corporation Representative Name	Designation
1	Malket Khanna	CSI (MCA)
2	Priyanka Gagan	CF (PMDC)
3		
4		
5		

School Name

School Waste Heroes

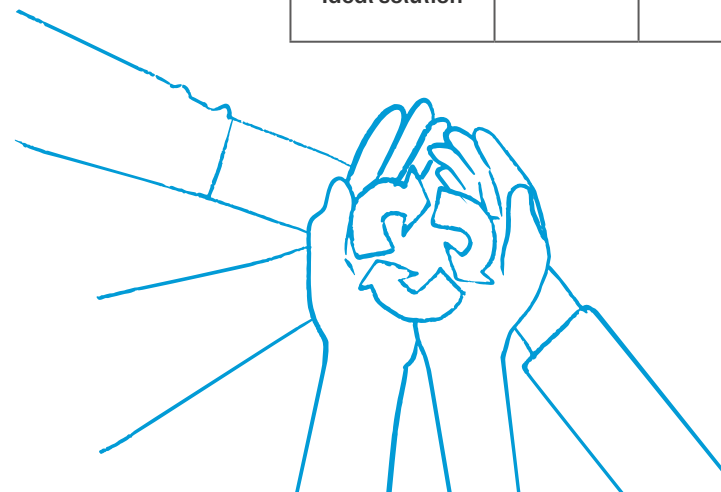
Total number of students in our school		
Male	Female	Other Gender

Name of the person who is handling the school's waste?

Our Concept for Waste Management

Aspect	Paper Waste	Plastic Waste	Food Waste	Metal Waste	Horticulture / Garden Waste	Special Care Waste	Sanitary Waste	Other / Unsorted Waste
Waste quantity produced in a day (kg)								
Current waste management practice	Choose and write for each type, how waste is being managed: • Managed within the school; • Informal waste collectors; • Municipal corporation; • Dumped; • Burnt; • No idea							
How is your waste managed?								
Do you think this is the right method of disposal?								
How can the school's waste be better managed?	Choose and write for each type: • Reduce; • Refuse; • Reuse; • Recycle; • Donate; • Compost; • Handover for treatment; • No idea							
Ideal solution								

Did you observe anything unusual or interesting during the waste audit?



Annexure 8. Your waste questions, answered

Below are answers to some questions students might have about waste and the waste audit — read through them.

1. What are the sources and type of waste generated in schools?

- a. Classrooms and offices
 - i. Paper (notebooks, worksheets, exam sheets, and notices)
 - ii. Stationery (pens, pencils, markers, erasers, and sharpeners)
 - iii. Packaging (plastic wrapping and cardboard boxes)
 - iv. Broken furniture, boards, and old teaching materials
 - v. Leftover aluminium foil from tiffin boxes
 - vi. Batteries
- b. Canteen and kitchen
 - i. Food waste (scraps, peels, and expired food)
 - ii. Plastic bottles, straws, and cups
 - iii. Disposable plates, cutlery, tissues, and packaging
 - iv. Used cooking oil
- c. Playgrounds and common areas
 - i. Plastic wrappers, snack packets, and bottles
 - ii. Broken sports equipment (balls, bats, nets, and shoes)
- d. Washrooms
 - i. Sanitary waste (pads, tampons, and tissues)
 - ii. Cleaning materials (soap wrappers, empty bottles, and disinfectants)
- e. Laboratories (science and computer)
 - i. Chemical waste from science experiments
 - ii. E-waste (damaged computers, cables, batteries, and old electronics)
 - iii. Glass waste (broken beakers and test tubes)
- f. Garden
 - i. Leaves, branches, and grass clippings
- g. Other
 - i. Construction and demolition debris (from renovations on the premises)
 - ii. Special care waste (paint, cleaning chemicals, bulbs, and tube lights)

2. Does ‘zero waste’ mean no waste at all?

As defined by the Zero Waste International Alliance (ZWIA), zero waste is the conservation of all resources through responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning or discharging them into land, water, or air in a way that threatens the environment or human health. Zero waste does not mean complete elimination of waste.

3. How does waste affect the environment?

Waste in landfills produces toxic gases, pollutes the air, soil, and water, and harms the environment. Properly managing waste can help protect nature and human health.

4. What happens if waste is put in the wrong bin?

If waste is put in the wrong bin, it can contaminate other waste. For example, food waste in the paper bin can soil paper and prevent it from being recycled.

5. Is it safe for students to handle waste?

Yes, if safety rules are followed. Students must wear gloves, shoe covers, and masks, and should never touch waste with their bare hands.

6. Why should participants not eat during the waste audit?

Eating during the waste audit can spread germs and cause illness. Clean hands and hygiene are very important while handling waste.

7. What should students do if they find sharp or dangerous items?

Do not touch them. Inform a teacher or school support staff immediately. Only adults should handle hazardous items, such as broken glass or blades.

8. What is MLP?

MLP stands for multilayered plastic. Think of it like a sandwich. It is a packaging material that is made of multiple layers – usually plastic, aluminium foil, and paper – that are pressed tightly together.

9. In which bin should tetra packs and disposable cups go?

Even though tetra packs (like juice boxes) appear to be made of cardboard, and some disposable cups resemble paper, they are lined with plastic or foil to prevent the liquid from seeping through. These should go into the dry waste (blue) bin (depending on your school’s specific setup), because they are a type of MLP.

10. In which bin should aluminium foil go?

Aluminium foil, often used to wrap food, is a metal. It goes into the metal category.
Tip: Please shake off any food crumbs before throwing it away!

11. What is ‘other’ waste?

‘Other’ waste refers to what cannot be sorted into the main categories. This usually happens for two reasons:

- Some waste cannot be sorted because it is too small to pick up with tongs or it gets mixed with dust and dirt (for example, while sweeping the floor). Since it cannot be physically separated, it is classified as ‘other’.
- Some materials are generated in such small quantities that they do not require a separate bin and are grouped under ‘other’. Examples include wooden pencil shavings, broken wooden rulers, and small scraps of cloth.



Scan to download
the manual

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