

Zero Waste Challenge Waste Tracking Instructions

As a participant of the Zero Waste Challenge you will track your waste for two weeks at the beginning, middle and end of the challenge, for a total of six weeks. You may adjust each timeframe by a few days to make it more convenient, but make sure to track for a full two weeks. Waste tracking for all six weeks is mandatory to participate in the Zero Waste Challenge.

The first two weeks of waste tracking are important to capture how your household manages its waste now, the middle two weeks will be a good check-in on the changes you are making, and the last two weeks will show your overall progress.

Participants will track their waste using one of two methods: weighing the waste or taking photos and volume estimates. Stick to the method you chose for the whole challenge.

Track all your waste streams

Track anything you get rid of from your household during the two-week tracking period using the following categories:

- **Trash:** This includes all waste discarded as trash.
- **Recycling:** This includes the material collected in your curbside or building recycling program.
- **Food and compostable waste (organics):** This includes all food and compostable waste that is collected curbside in an organics recycling program, taken to an organics recycling drop-off site, or composted in a backyard compost bin. Track each separately if you use more than one method.
- **Plastic bags:** If you collect plastic bags for recycling at a drop-off site (such as a local grocery store) track this material as well.
- **Donated or sold clothing and household items:** Track any clothing or household items that are donated, given away or sold.

If you were not previously separating items for recycling, organics recycling or donation, do not change this for the first round of measurement.

Track your waste weekly

Submit your data once per week during the two-week tracking periods. Use the templates we provide to help you track in between submissions and keep the categories separate. Email your information to your liaison.

How will you remember to track your waste?

Post a reminder at the door you use to take waste out to your carts/dumpsters. Use post-it notes, hang a clipboard somewhere convenient, set phone reminders, post it on the family calendar, ask your liaison to send a text reminder, etc.

Instructions for each of the two tracking methods -- weighing waste or taking pictures and volume estimates-- are on the next pages.

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Method One: Weighing

Instructions for weighing waste

Weigh each separate stream of waste as you take it out during the week and record your totals to submit once per week.

How to use your county-provided scale

1. Turn scale on and wait for the screen to set to "0"
2. **Be sure your scale is set to "lb.," or pounds.** On some scales, you can change this by hitting the "UNIT" button.
3. Place item you are weighing on the hook and hold up so that the item hangs without touching the floor or any other surface.
4. Wait until the number on the screen stops changing for the final weight. Some scales will make a beeping sound at the final weight, others will say "HOLD," flash a light that says "HOLD," or show a locked symbol.
5. Hit the power button to weigh something new.



If you weigh your waste in a bag such as shown in the top left and right images below, you can simply use the weight. If you weigh it in a container or waste bin like the bottom left image, remember to weigh the empty bin and subtract the weight of the bin from your total weight.



If you are using your own scale

You can use a scale such as a kitchen scale to measure small amounts of waste, or a luggage scale or bathroom scale to measure larger quantities. Remember to weigh the empty bin (or the person) holding the waste and subtract it from the total to get the correct weight of your waste. Use the same scale throughout the challenge so your weights stay consistent.

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Method Two: Photos and Volume

Instructions on taking photos and volume estimates

1. Take photos before trash day

Take a photo of each waste stream once a week (trash, recycling, organics).

- If your household uses its own curbside cart(s), take a photo of the contents the day before your waste hauler empties it.
- If you share a cart or dumpster with other households, do your best to consolidate into one indoor container before you take waste out. For example, if you have a recycling container in the kitchen, a bathroom and a bedroom, dump it all into a single larger container for the picture. Keep the large containers you use consistent throughout the challenge.
- If your household does backyard composting, co-collection of organics with trash or takes organics to a drop-off, do your best to consolidate and take a photo of the bag or container before you take it out or drop it off. Keep the container you use consistent throughout the challenge.



If you want to go the extra mile, consider taking a bonus photo of detail, such as:



- An item you don't know how to get rid of
- Plastic bags or items for donation
- Your full week's waste spread out on a surface such as a tarp or bag so you can see everything (see pictures to the left!)

2. Estimate the fullness of your containers

Estimate the fullness of your carts and/or containers from step one. You can estimate to the nearest quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, full, overflowing). Use the separate template to keep track of your waste. This will be especially useful if you share a cart/dumpster or take out your waste multiple times per week. Submit this information along with your photos.

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Frequently Asked Questions: ZWC Waste Tracking

Q: What kinds of waste do I track again?

A: Track all the waste you get rid of from inside your household. This means trash, recyclables, food scraps, etc. You do not need to track yard or garden waste.

Q: What if I'm doing a large house project, such as remodeling?

A: Make a note of the projects or construction waste, but you do not need to track it and can keep it separate from your other household waste. We want to focus on your typical waste for this challenge (but we do have advice on waste reduction with home projects).

Q: What about cardboard?

A: Yep, keep track of cardboard! You do not need to track different types of recyclables separately, but if you are weighing, it may be easier to weigh cardboard by itself. You can cut a hole into the large pieces to hang from a scale or stick the hook into the corner of a box of other cardboard boxes. If you're taking pictures, it is a little easier to capture.

Q: Do I need to keep track of food scraps if they are just going into my backyard compost?

A: Yes!

Q: What if I take my waste out multiple times per week?

A: Track it each time and add it up to get a weekly total. You may want to adjust your habits by a little bit to consolidate your waste for these two weeks so you can do the tracking fewer times.

Q: What do I do with the information?

A: Email your waste weights or photos and volume estimates to your liaison. They will use it to help you set goals and track your progress.

Other tips:

If you are weighing- don't forget to subtract the weight of your container!

If you are taking pictures- make sure to use the same containers over the course of the challenge so you can make an easier comparison of your progress.