

INTRODUCTION

A waste audit is a comprehensive assessment of your university's wastestream. It's an opportunity to understand the problem of move-out waste on your campus in order to build an effective program and measure your success.

OBTAINING WASTE REPORTS

Some department on your campus manages waste disposal contracts. It's usually a department called Facilities, Campus Plan, or something of that ilk. This department should have records of the amount of waste generated every month – possibly even broken down by specific dumpsters.

If possible, we recommend sorting the waste reports into disposal from dorms / apartments vs. academic and administrative buildings. This will allow you to determine how much waste students generate during the average month, as well as during the month of move-out. For example, at UNH we determined that students threw away an average of 25 tons a month, but 105 tons during the month of May! These numbers were extremely helpful when communicating the importance of the program to students and administrators.

Let us know if you're having trouble analyzing the waste data – We're happy to help!

OBSERVING CAMPUS WASTE

In addition to looking at the data, you'll want to get a firsthand sense of what waste on your campus looks like. Start by mapping out dorms and dumpsters on your campus. Then organize teams of students to visit these sites during move-out to see what students are throwing out and when they're doing so.

Don't forget off-campus housing, and keep in mind that some universities bring extra dumpsters onto campus to help handle move-out waste.

Your objective is to gain a holistic understanding of move-out waste on your campus. Learn as much as possible so that you're prepared when you launch your program and start collecting items. Keep in mind that you don't need to solve everything right away – but you'll want to create a strong program in year one so that it can expand in the future.

For that reason, it's important to be thorough. Visit sites every day during move out. Maybe most students on your campus move out over one or two days – you need to know when that is. To make sure you cover everything, recruit friends and volunteers and divide up the campus. Try to cover the entire move-out period – from the start of final exams, to the day after commencement.

DOCUMENTING YOUR FINDINGS

It's important to document what you find, and pictures are worth a thousand words! Getting evidence of dumpsters overflowing with useable items and electronic waste can be extremely valuable when communicating the importance of your program. You can use this evidence in meetings with administrators, in on-campus promotion, and more to give people a sense of the problem you're working to address.

If possible, capture video, too. As your program grows, you'll want to have video showing how you got started, and what the problem looked like before you began your efforts. If you choose to make a video down the line, you'll be glad you have old footage to use. You don't need to be a video pro to get good footage. Take a few seconds of video of an overflowing dumpster, or pan slowly across the scene. Get shots of you and volunteers assessing waste. A few minutes of footage can be gold in a few years!

