



## Litterless Lunch

**Action:** Create a litterless or reduced waste program in the classroom or school

### **Best time to do this project:**

This project works well early in the school year and over the course of the winter. Students can conduct the before, during and after surveys any time of year. This is a great project to conclude with a celebration during International Earth Week in April or Canadian National Environmental Week in June.

The scope of the project can vary widely from a one day initiative in one class to a full school initiative for the entire school year.

### **Time commitment:**

- Planning: Three to four meetings with your team of students
- Baseline data collection: A few lunch periods per week for one to two weeks
- Advertising of campaign: One week (announcements, classroom visits etc.)
- Maintenance: One month of occasional lunchroom litter monitoring
- Collection of new data (post-implementation): One to two lunch periods
- Analysis of success: One meeting

### **Background:**

Lunches are often goldmines for wastefulness. They may contain single-use plastic bags, aluminum foil, disposable cutlery, wax paper, or single-serving items that come in their own disposable packages. While we all enjoy these conveniences, few of us are willing to allow new landfills and incinerators to be built in our own neighbourhoods to accommodate our growing waste problem.

Communities are now battling over who will accept the trash. NIMBY, meaning not-in-my-back-yard, is a term used to describe this phenomenon.

By reducing waste that is sent to landfills, students are also helping to reduce the potential leakage of toxic materials into ground water. By implementing a waste-free lunch, students can take responsibility for their own actions by analyzing their lunches and developing ideas on how to reduce their personal garbage consumption.

This project is also a great way to teach students that equal attention should be given to reducing the amount of materials we consume, as well as to recycling and reusing.

### **This project will give students the opportunity to:**

- Examine actions that generate less waste and reduce litter
- Learn the importance of reducing consumption prior to reusing or recycling
- Understand how much garbage they produce, where this garbage goes and the impact on the environment
- Explore recyclable versus non-recyclable products and the impact on landfills



- Conduct a trash audit

#### **Fast facts:**

- A litterless lunch typically costs less than a pre-packaged lunch.
- A successful litterless lunch campaign can reduce overall waste produced by more than half!
- A litterless lunch can cut down on litter in the school yard
- It has been estimated that on average a school-age child using a disposable lunch generates 30 kilograms of waste per school year. That equates to almost 9000 kilograms of lunch waste for just one average-size elementary school!
- In 1981 the world's first blue box recycling program was launched in Kitchener, Ontario.
- A whopping 99 per cent of Ontario's households have access to a recycling program.
- Canadians typically take home over 50 million plastic shopping bags each week.
- Over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of office waste is paper. The majority of this is not recycled.
- It only takes five recycled plastic soda bottles to make enough fibrefill to make one ski jacket.
- Recycling cardboard saves 25 per cent of the energy required to make new cardboard.
- Glass never wears out—it can be recycled forever
- If every household in Canada reused a paper grocery bag for one shopping trip, about 60,000 trees would be saved.
- In some households, yard trimmings and food scraps make up about a quarter of the waste generated.
- Twenty aluminum cans can be recycled with the amount of energy required to make a new can from raw ore.
- Using recycled aluminum instead of raw materials reduces air pollution from the manufacturing plant by 95 per cent.
- The energy saved from one recycled can will operate a television set for three hours.
- Every aluminum can today is made from an average of 54 per cent aluminum that has been recycled by consumers.

#### **Getting started:**

- Get approval for your Litterless Lunch campaign
- Create a plan. Determine which type of campaign would work best in your school.
- Advertise the campaign throughout the school and at home (notify parents).
- Gather baseline data before you implement your Litterless Lunch campaign so you can demonstrate positive change. Try examining the waste produced by one classroom over the course of one week.
- Start small. Pick a day that will be dedicated to a Litterless Lunch.
- If the day is successful, try expanding it to a week, month or all year long!



- You can also start with one aspect of a Litterless Lunch, such as eliminating disposable water bottles in favour of reusable containers or using sandwich containers instead of disposable plastic bags.
- Consult other schools that have carried out Litterless Lunch projects.
- Involve as many classes and students as possible.
- Have students collect their own garbage as a class for one day and/or one week (be sure to obtain permission to do this).
- Have students record what items are most often found in the garbage.
- Have the students sort their categories of trash into reusable/recyclable and non-recyclable piles (this is a great place to discuss the difference).
- Total each category of trash for the class
- Discuss ways to further reduce the non-recyclable pile.
- Discard the non-recyclable items and decide how to recycle the remainder of the items. Also look at how some of the items could be reused or repaired.

#### **Maintaining interest in the project:**

- Create posters highlighting the importance of rethinking, reducing and reusing prior to recycling. Display in the cafeteria and around the school.
- Have students paint, draw on or sew their lunch boxes or bags to ensure a personalized touch! Have students express their views about why they are participating in the Litterless Lunch campaign on their bags or containers.
- Ensure that a fair rotation of duties occurs, such as weighing the garbage or recycling bins at lunch.
- Students should be primarily responsible for the maintenance of this program.
- Provide incentives to promote the program. For example, each month give a prize to the class who reduced their waste production the most, or who produced the least waste in the school.
- Hold competitions to see who can produce the least waste or who can create ingenious uses for materials that would otherwise be recycled or thrown out.
- Have an art exhibition where students must use materials destined for the recycling bin.
- Have students create musical instruments out of discarded materials.
- Donate items such as paper towel rolls, toilet paper rolls and tissue boxes to charities.
- Design a lunch box that students could sell.
- Using magazines, drawings or theatrics to compose the perfectly packaged school lunch and demonstrate it to other classes.

#### **Helpful hints:**

- Make sure students have the proper equipment such as rubber gloves for handling trash. Some students will have no problem with a garbage audit, others may strongly protest. Make sure to do any garbage or recycling sorting in a suitable place, preferably outside.
- Try doing comparisons by weight. Keep in mind that, in the name of competition, students may try to hide food or sabotage other classes by adding waste to theirs! Emphasize to the students at the beginning that this is not acceptable.



- Never single out individual students for what they have brought to class unless they volunteer.

### **Troubleshooting:**

#### *What if my school already has a recycling program?*

This is an excellent opportunity to see how well the system is working. Have students analyze the amount of garbage that ends up in the recycling or the amount of recycling that still ends up in the garbage. This is also a good time to link your recycling program to other action projects such as composting.

#### *What if my school has a pizza day?*

There are still ways to stress the importance of a litterless lunch. Go over where and how a pizza box is created. Have a look at how many your school has ordered. Are they being recycled? Are they made from recycled paper?

#### *What if students in our school buy their lunch?*

There are still opportunities to reduce waste and emphasize health. Have students track where their cafeteria food comes from and examine the impact of this food on their health.

#### *What does a litterless lunch look like?*

- Sandwiches and other main dishes, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, and treats in a reusable lunch container
- Cloth napkins or napkins made from 100 per cent recycled material
- Stainless-steel forks and spoons
- Reusable drink containers
- Reusable lunchboxes
- Lunch bags made from old fabric (denim works well!)

#### *How does a typical lunch differ from a litterless lunch?*

A litterless lunch typically does not include:

- Disposable paper and plastic bags/wrap
- Sandwiches sealed in plastic bags/wrap
- Fruits and vegetables in plastic bags/wrap
- Pre-packaged chips, cookies, fruit bars, granola bars, cheeses, and fruit leathers
- Pre-packaged food in small quantities when a larger bulk order could be purchased and divided up into reusable containers
- Snack foods sealed in plastic bags
- Disposable juice boxes or pouches, soda cans, water bottles, and milk cartons
- Plastic forks and spoons
- Paper napkins