

Rethink the School Year

*Back to School Waste Reduction Tips from
Greening Schools and the Illinois Waste Management and Research Center*

Recycle, Reduce, Reuse, Rebuy

Steps in successful school waste reduction programs include the above 4R's, but a newer concept, **Rethink**, encourages acceptance of the entire cycle.

Rethink this school year from the first day.

Recycle items rather than automatically placing them in the trash.

Reduce the amount of waste generated in the classroom

Reuse what is possible

Rebuy items that have been made from recycled products

Rethink the way you approach everything.

Zero Waste integrates the 5Rs and more for **Sustainability**

Buy food in containers that can easily be recycled in your community

Avoid purchases of items wrapped in multiple layers

Use paper on both sides before recycling

Consider needs vs wants

Recommending reusable lunch boxes is great, but how many students actually carry lunch?

Second-Chance Week Co. Elementary teachers are great at identifying “getting-to-know-you” activities. Consider holding a second-chance week the second week of school. Hold a trade and share day. Encourage students to bring in electronics, toys, books, and other items that they no longer use, but that are functional. Over the summer they probably lost interest in certain toys and books. Suggest they bring in good school supplies from last year to trade (**OR** reuse). Make these available to trade and give away.

Zero Wasters, Inc School neighbors will love this. Schools are part of the local community and students are “citizens” of the community. What can they set as a goal for the school year to help keep the community looking nice or to improve the appearance of the community? Could your class plan a school project for the year that would encourage rethinking and recycling? Could they become Zero Wasters?

Some suggestions include:

- Form a **ZW Club**
- Take advantage of “Environmentally Friendly” fund-raising activities to pay for ZW Club events.
- Host **Locker and Desk Cleanout Parties** once a month. Incorporate second-chance days into the party event.
- Salvage waste through the year for a **Creative Trash Art Exhibit (and Sale)** to be held near the end of the year or in conjunction with Earth Day in April.

- Implement **Neighborhood Cleanup Days** twice during the school year. Work with the community, parent teacher associations, and other classes to adopt either a portion of the school campus for a litter pick up or a portion of the surrounding community and campus. Recycle and reuse where possible.
- **Post-Consumer Product Displays.** The success of recycling arises from knowing that markets exist for post-consumer items. Plastic bottles become commodities that can be used for a variety of usable products. Students can conduct online research to locate products made from recyclables and they can order samples to create educational displays at the school. Waste is actually a resource in disguise.
- Learn more about Zero Waste at Tools for Zero Waste Schools, <http://www.kidsrecycle.org/index.php>

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- During the first week, encourage your class to adopt a “**Rethink Policy**” complete with guidelines that can be maintained throughout the year. Rethinking can become a life style if practiced long enough. Develop a mission (and classroom logo) that embraces sustainability and the 5 R’s. Contact Illinois Waste Management and Research Center (217 244-5637) to learn about a new program that will allow your class to form a virtual not-for-profit organization with a mission to implement a school and class project.

More Waste Reduction Tips

Wise and valuable suggestions for reducing school waste can be found through a variety of resources. A number of these offer additional resources with each opening more links.

Back-to-Shopping Waste Reduction Tip links:

- **Go Back to School Green: Top Ten Waste Reduction and Recycling Tips.**
http://www.hennepin.us/vgn/portal/internet/hcnewsarticlemaster/0,2301,1273_1716_1131469_95.00.html
- **Back to School Waste Prevention** <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/WPW/Home/BackToSch.htm>
- **Top Ten Ways to Reduce Waste While Back-to-School Shopping**
http://ladpw.org/epd/ea/misc/tips/env_tips.cfm
- **Back to School Consumer Tips**
<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/specials/funfacts/school3.htm>
- **Recycle in the Classroom** <http://www.re-sources.org/programs/schoolrecycle.htm>
- **Resourcities, A tool kit for urban decision-makers on waste & resources in European cities**
<http://www.acrr.org/resourcities/dematerialisation/practices/Schools.htm>
- **Greening Schools, Back to School Waste Reduction for additional links and resources,**
http://www.greeningschools.org/resources/view_cat_teacher.cfm?id=189

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www.wmrc.uiuc.edu

217 244 5637

One Hazelwood Drive, Champaign, Illinois, 61820