



Dumpster Dive

Campus Race to Zero Waste Activity

Effort & Resources



Involved. Requires advance planning, administrative approval, and dedicated volunteers.



Moderate. Safety gear, thank you gift for volunteers (i.e. pizza, gift certificates).

Objective & Overview

Use this activity to encourage students to recycle by demonstrating the volume of recyclable materials that go to waste by being thrown in the trash. Volunteers will sort waste into bins or piles. As the piles grow, the goal is to show students that every time they toss “just one” can, bottle, or mobile device into the trash, it adds up to a lot of wasted recyclables.

Step 1: Planning and Permission

Before you begin planning this activity, get permission from your student activities or waste management office to sort waste from your cafeteria or student union. Choose an outdoor area or another place with lots of passers-by. Check in advance if you need to have a facilities or campus security representative present at the event location.

Step 2: Gather Materials

- Caution tape or rope to designate waste sorting area
- Protective suits for volunteers (can buy a disposable one for \$5 at pksafety.com)
- Posters advertising your event and explanatory signs to post near the site (pages 3-4)
- Tables or clear plastic bags to emphasize recyclables that went into the trash
- Large tarps to protect the ground from waste

Step 3: Promote and Prepare

Promote the event in advance with flyers around campus (see sample on page 3). Make it fun by listing who will be “dumpster diving,” and consider adding your campus logo. Also be sure to hang signs near the event so that people walking by understand what’s happening.



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Activity continued

Step 4: Dive In!

Outfit your team in gloves and protective clothing, and start sorting! However you choose to separate trash from recyclable material, make sure the recyclables are clearly marked and displayed prominently—the goal is to show students, staff, and faculty the actual quantities of recyclables versus “true” trash.

If you want to involve some artists on your campus, you could have a few volunteer to make sculptures with found objects or recyclables as you sort through the trash. Display the sculptures later to call attention to all the recyclable materials that were in the trash. Also consider doing [volume-to-weight conversions](#) so that you can share the weight of trash versus recyclables found in your school’s waste stream.

Step 5: Take it to the Next Level!

Get the most from your dumpster dive by building the results into a larger story. Take out an advertisement in the campus paper afterward announcing the amount of recyclables, write an op-ed, or get a campus reporter to do the story. Announce that you’ll do another sort later in the Campus Race to Zero Waste and challenge the campus to reduce the amount of recyclables in the trash.



Dumpster Dive *Campus Race to Zero Waste*

What is this “rubbish”?

Your fellow students are going through the campus trash in search of recyclables and sorting their findings to see how much recycled material gets thrown away. The next time you’re about to toss “just one” item in the trash, think of the piles of recyclables you see here and remember: it all adds up.