

REDUCING WORKPLACE OFFICE WASTE

A practical guide to help offices towards zero waste

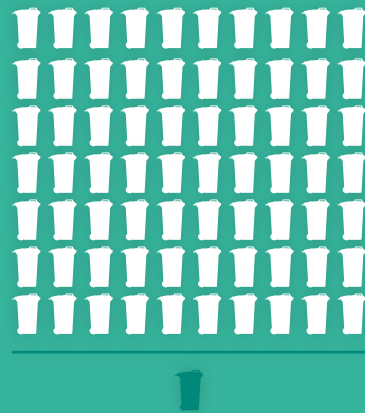
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WHY SHOULD I REDUCE MY WASTE?

Environmental sustainability is now a key part of doing business. By minimising your waste, you can cut your disposal costs, reduce your carbon footprint, and build your brand's reputation with staff and customers alike.

In 2023, Queenstown Lakes District businesses were **surveyed** to get a snapshot of how organisations were managing their waste and how they could be supported to reduce and minimise their waste outputs. The majority of respondents said that reducing their environmental impact was a key motivator to minimise waste and 92% said that waste reduction was important or very important to their business.

QLDC is committed to helping our communities become a low waste and low emissions district, and to helping your business achieve its waste minimisation goals.



For every one rubbish bin of waste that you put out on the kerb, **70 rubbish bins of waste were made upstream just to make that one bin on the kerb.** Even if we could recycle 100% of the waste coming out of our households, it does not get to the core of the problem. Correct recycling is vital, but we need to think about cutting off the waste streams and bringing less waste into our businesses in the first place. **The Story of Stuff** is essential reading and talks more about this.



Credit: racool_studio

WASTE REDUCTION: IT'S A TEAM EFFORT

Work and consultations with businesses of all sizes across the region has identified the key waste streams for offices and have come up with practical solutions to help you reduce your waste.

Making a start can be the hardest part. Together with your team and stakeholders, identify what you can tackle first. Teamwork is key to reducing your waste. Your colleagues, contractors and staff may have ideas you've not thought of and if they are engaged and committed to your waste goals, it will be easier to communicate these values to your clients and customers.

Wastebusters has put together **a document** to help you communicate your waste minimisation strategies to your team, with wording for staff induction manuals. It's a great idea to have a policy in place so that waste minimisation is seen as the norm from the outset.

Be creative! No idea is a bad idea. Could you establish a rooftop or indoor garden where you could run a compost or worm farm system for your food waste, tea leaves, and coffee granules? Use food waste to create food for your team and establish a vegetable garden which you can work on together and from which everyone will benefit.



Credit: Kiwi Harvest

DAY TO DAY IN THE OFFICE

According to a 2018 Environmental Protection Agency study, the average office worker generates about **900g worth of paper and paperboard products every day** and uses roughly **10,000 sheets of copy paper per year!** Worse, a study from Xerox found that nearly half of all printed documents are thrown away within **24 hours**, and **30% are never picked up from the printer at all.**



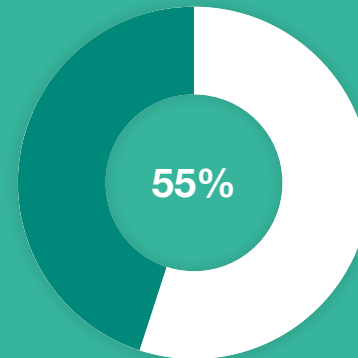
- Make the most of technology and cut down on your printing. Cloud software, shared online files and e-signatures can instantly reduce your paper footprint.
- Demand the same of your suppliers, customers and colleagues. Ask for invoices, orders etc. to be emailed.
- Reuse any envelopes and paper items for scrap paper in the office. Then recycle it when you don't need it anymore!
- If you do need paper, buy environmentally responsible and certified paper in recyclable packaging.
- When you need to print, go double-sided, black and white, and use draft settings to reduce ink.
- Implement print management software to monitor and control printing activities.
- Set up bins for collecting one-sided printed paper for reuse as notepaper.
- Remove individual rubbish bins from work stations to discourage unnecessary waste and have prominent and centralised recycling points. Have a look at the [QLDC website](#) to make sure you know what materials you can recycle in the district and [check out these guidelines for tips on how set up effective rubbish and recycling stations.](#)
- Consider introducing waste into your regular reporting and involve all of your team.
- Research options for sourcing supplies made from recycled materials, including every day stationery.
- Don't be fooled by compostable packaging! It might seem like a good alternative to plastic, but it is problematic. There are no facilities in the region that will accept compostable packaging and in landfill they will emit harmful methane.
- Encourage the reuse of binders, folders, and other office supplies, and set up recycling programs for items that can't be reused.
- Opt-out of unwanted mail subscriptions and switch to digital newsletters.
- Educate employees about waste reduction practices and their benefits.
- Make sure everyone understands how to recycle batteries and electronic waste responsibly. Batteries cannot be placed into rubbish or recycling bins as they pose a significant fire risk to collection trucks and waste facilities. Refer to the [A-Z Rubbish and Recycling Directory](#) for information on how to recycle batteries and other electronic waste responsibly.



Credit: Warren & Mahoney

OFFICE KITCHENS AND STAFF ROOMS

- Make sure you have clear signage and guidance at your recycling stations. Small tweaks to their signage made a world of difference in the **Mons Royale** office. Signage help can be found [here](#).
- Introduce a compost caddy or bokashi bins to your kitchen/ staff rooms, and discuss with your team who could use these in their home composts or garden. If this is not possible, reach out into the community to find someone who could take organic waste. **Sharewaste**, **Zero Waste Glenorchy** and **Grow Wānaka** offer options for individuals and businesses alike. [QLDC's website](#) offers a comprehensive list of hubs in the region.
- Make sure your coffee machines are waste free, e.g. plunger coffee. Grindings from plungers or loose ground coffee machines can be composted.
- Use loose-leaf tea or tea bags that are plastic free and fully compostable.
- Research whether you can be part of a refillable milk system (such as Windy Ridge) or buy your milk in glass bottles. Tetrapak cartons, used a lot for alternatives to dairy milk, can be recycled at Wānaka Wastebusters.
- Have a “lunch library” of reusable crockery, containers and drinkware for your team to use.
- Remove all single-use items: sachets, napkins, hand towels, disposable cups, plates, and utensils. Replace these with reusable alternatives.
- Have clear rubbish and recycling stations and consider removing some of your office place rubbish bins to discourage unnecessary waste. Have a look at the [QLDC website](#) to make sure you know what materials you can recycle in the district and [check out these guidelines for tips on how set up effective rubbish and recycling stations](#).



When architects, Warren & Mahoney, worked with Wastebusters to audit their Queenstown office waste, they found that 55% of their waste was potentially compostable.

This had the potential to divert 140kg from landfill each year, reducing their waste disposal costs and lowering their greenhouse gas emissions. [You can read the full audit here.](#)



Credit: Freepik

SUPPLIES AND SUPPLIERS

According to the Sustainability Business Network, about 70% of your business' sustainability impact comes from your supply chain. Whether it's talking to your existing suppliers or looking for alternatives, beginning at the source is key.

- Talk to your suppliers about their packaging. Is it necessary? Is it recyclable?
- Consider local suppliers who can provide products with little or no packaging. (Plus, you're supporting local!)
- Consider renting office equipment and furniture, and check second-hand options before you go for something new. If buying new, opt for durable and repairable items.
- Repurpose your packaging. People are often keen to source pallets for home projects and you can shred paper for packaging of your own.
- Use refillable containers. Whether it's ink cartridges, whiteboard markers, soap, cleaning products or kitchen items, opt for products that can be refilled.
- If you use an external cleaning company, talk to them about your goals and expectations and get them on board. Include your waste minimisation objectives and KPIs in contracts.

Office supplies company, Office Max, is just one company that's worked hard to improve their products and their own packaging. In 2021, they removed 21 tonnes of plastic packaging from their products, diverted 88 tonnes of unsaleable products and furniture from landfill, and connected their business customers with a charity to whom they could donate office furniture to be repurposed and resold.



Credit: Soul Food

SO MANY IDEAS, SO MANY QUESTIONS! WHERE SHOULD I LOOK NEXT?

Remember you're not alone and help is at hand! Here are some useful links to support you on your waste reducing journey:

- Check out these other industry resource guides. You may find more ideas there to help you on the path to zero waste.
- Take a look at this general guide for businesses, which gives additional ideas on how to implement changes in the workplace with helpful links and resources.
- You can find some rubbish and recycling signage on the QLDC website here: QLDC - Waste Minimisation for Businesses.
- The Sustainable Business Network has a free guide to reducing office waste.
- Talk to Zero Waste champions in Aotearoa like Wastebusters, Zero Waste Network NZ, Sustainable Queenstown, Zero Waste Glenorchy, Wao, Sustainable Business Network, and WasteMINZ. Sign up to their newsletters, join their zero waste events and be part of the conversation.
- Go global. Look at what other businesses are doing around the world to reduce their office waste. Stopwaste, The Sustainable Office Kit, Waste Today Business Awards, EPA commercial resources. Listen to Upstream Solutions' Indisposable podcast for ideas and inspiration. Cool California has a great Green Business Guide.
- Make good purchasing decisions using this smart purchasing guide to ask questions of your suppliers.
- Connect with other low-waste businesses via circular economy directory or CiRCLR - a simple B2B platform that encourages circular economies, which turns the existing cost of waste disposal into new revenue streams for businesses.
- Consider undertaking a waste audit - you can't take action if you don't know what you're dealing with. Waste audits connect you with zero waste experts who have the know-how to help you with simple and measurable waste solutions.
- Get back to basics. Find out who is offering waste management services in your area.
- Be inspired. Read local case studies to see what other businesses have done to reduce their waste.



Credit: Canyon Brewery

This guide was written by Wastebusters and designed by QLDC under the QLDC Zero Waste District Programme funding as part of the Resourceful Communities initiative.

Resourceful Communities aims to make the link between global work on the circular economy and local reduction and reuse activities.

The year-round programme inspires and supports behaviours that are part of the transition to a more circular economy.

Our aim is to help to build a culture where resources are valued and kept in use, and waste minimisation is the norm.

