

Reducing business waste – Preschools and childcare centres



How to halve your waste

Food waste fills almost 30% of the average waste bin of a typical childcare centre or preschool. Paper, cardboard and plastic occupy at least another 25%¹. That means over half the contents of the bin could be recovered instead of going to landfill.

In NSW, millions of dollars-worth of food is thrown away each month, while 100,000 people go hungry, a quarter of them children. We can make simple changes that can save time, save money, help others and stop edible food going to landfill. Businesses in NSW could recover an additional 140,529 tonnes of food waste or prevent 281 million meals from going to landfill each year².

Fifty-three per cent of businesses agree that efficient waste and recycling gives them a competitive edge³.

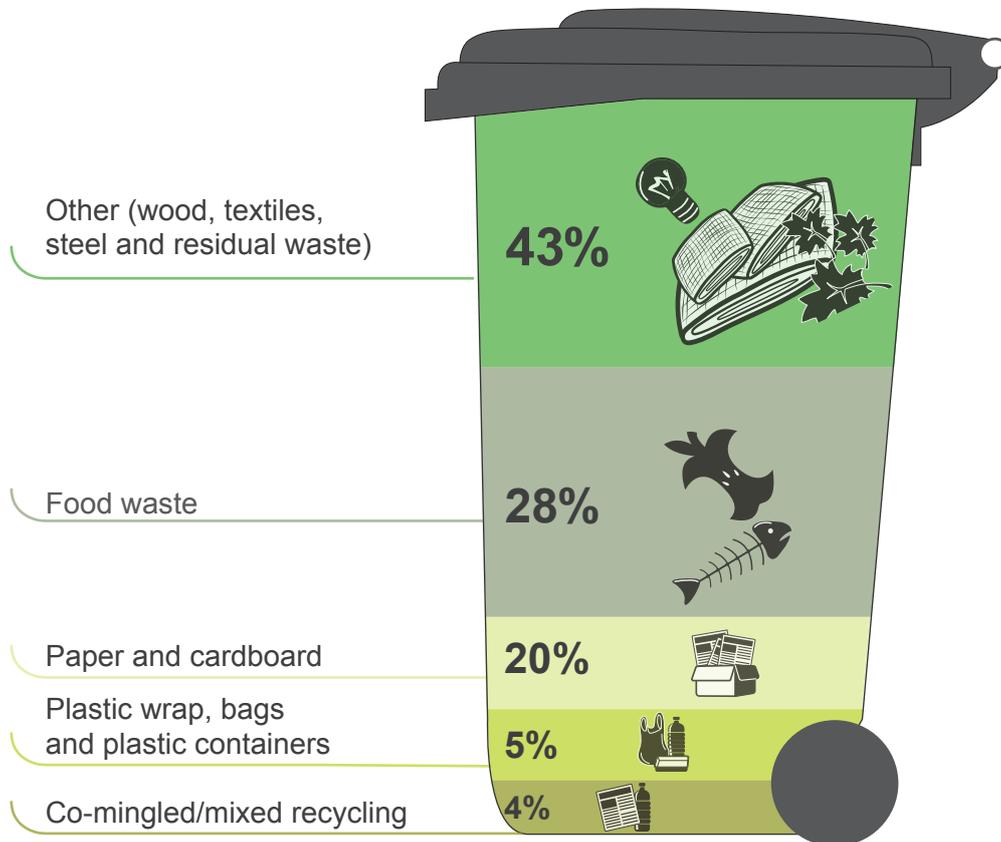
Forty per cent of businesses believe that being able to tell customers and clients that they recycle as much as possible helps them win and retain business³.



Quick fact

Each year a typical childcare centre or preschool generates up to 7.25m³ of waste per employee or 0.26m³ of waste for every 1m² of floor space¹.

Contents of a typical waste bin in a preschool or childcare centre



Typical waste profile of a preschool or childcare centre (% weight of waste generated)¹



Want to save on waste?

Join 20,000 businesses already recycling more with the EPA's Bin Trim Program. Get free advice and support to waste less and recycle more. Get up to \$50,000 back on recycling equipment. [Find a Bin Trim assessor online.](#)



What you can do

Avoid – how can you do it?

- Encourage parents and children to bring reusable containers for lunch and snack items.
- Encourage children to use reusable drink bottles. Offer to refill drink bottles when required.
- Use alternatives to paper towels in bathrooms.
- Encourage children to eat healthy fruit and vegetables rather than packaged foods.
- Improve catering stock control by ordering exactly what is needed.
- Consider more frequent ordering of smaller quantities of fresh produce to minimise spoilage.
- Seek regular feedback on menu items and serving sizes. Adjust menu offerings to suit children's preferences and appetites.
- [Love Food Hate Waste](#) has easy-to-follow advice on how to reduce your business food waste.

Reduce – how can you improve on it?

- Use emails, websites and text messages to communicate with parents, instead of paper notices.
- Set your printer to print double sided.
- Buy in bulk to reduce the quantity of packaging.
- Buy detergents in bulk and decant into smaller containers.
- Keep your work and play areas clean, tidy, labelled and organised.
- Check the temperatures and the seals on fridges and freezers regularly to keep food fresher for longer. Maintain correct temperatures: fridge 3–4°C and freezer less than minus 18°C.
- Keep dry storage areas dry and clean.
- Rotate stock – maintain a first-in, first-out system.
- Check food labels regularly: 'use-by' and 'best-by' dates
- Consult your local council Environmental Health Officer or the [NSW Food Authority](#) for specific advice on food storage techniques to avoid spoilage and preserve food-safe conditions.

Reuse – how can you use it again?

- Reuse plastic bottles, cardboard rolls, paper and boxes for craft activities.
- Encourage children to come up with ideas to reuse waste products and packaging.
- Reuse large cardboard boxes for storage.

Recycle – how can you do more?

- Ask your waste/recycling service provider how they can help you to recycle more. Many have services to educate staff, parents and children and also signage to support your recycling program.
- Set up a bin separation system for the kitchen and classroom areas.
- Use compost bins or large in-vessel composters to process food organics on site. This not only reduces the volume of waste but also creates a useful soil enhancer (compost).



Illawarra Area Childcare reduces food waste

Across its 11 Early Childhood Education and Care centres, Illawarra Area Childcare stopped 8 tonnes a year of food waste from going to landfill.

The group received an EPA [Bin Trim rebate](#) to help purchase commercial worm farms, compost bins and small food separation bins. The compost bins and worm farms provide a unique learning opportunity for both the staff and children at the centres.

Children were appointed to Recycling Rangers, Compost Commandoes, Worm Warriors and Garden Gnomes to help look after the system. [Join Bin Trim now.](#)



- Use worm farms (or vermiculture systems) as a fun way for children to get involved in ‘recycling’ their organic fruit and vegetable scraps.
- Create a vegetable garden and use the compost, worm liquid or worm castings to enhance the soil.
- Organise for food waste to be collected by a commercial contractor for transport to a processing facility.
- Collect all soft plastics and take them to [REDcycle](#) for recycling
- Recycle more packaging materials.
- Make sure any staff, contractors, caterers and cleaners follow your recycling program and that they put materials in the correct bins.
- Install clear [recycling signs](#) in the bin room, staff areas, stock rooms, and in the kitchen.
- Keep bins and bin rooms clean and uncluttered.
- You are responsible for making sure your waste is transported to a facility that is lawfully able to accept that type of waste. Make sure you understand your [responsibilities under the law](#).



Worm farms save tonnes at early learning centres

Guardian Early Learning Centres in Sydney have saved 5 tonnes of food waste from going to landfill each year. With assistance from an EPA [Bin Trim rebate](#), worm farms were installed at 10 care centres. [Join Bin Trim now](#).



Find a recycler

Visit BusinessRecycling.com.au or phone the Business Recycling Hotline on 1300 763 768 to find a recycling service to suit your business. Use the Planet Ark resource on [choosing the right recycler](#).

Photos

page 1: Wallaroo Children’s Centre, Nathaniel Marsh, TVU Productions;
 page 2: Wallaroo Children’s Centre, Nathaniel Marsh, TVU Productions;
 page 3: Wallaroo Children’s Centre, Nathaniel Marsh, TVU Productions;
 page 4: Shutterstock image

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ISBN 978-1-76039-631-2 | EPA 2016/0774

March 2017

What else can you do?

- Gain commitment from your senior managers and catering staff to reduce waste and increase recycling.
- Appoint a staff champion to drive your waste reduction and recycling program.
- Appoint student recycling champions or monitors.
- Get the children involved in [regularly checking](#) the amount and type of waste that is in the waste and recycling bins.
- Incorporate recycling, composting and gardening into the education program.
- Work with your staff, parents and children to put together a plan to improve your waste and recycling.
- Reward staff, parents and children for reducing waste, recycling more and using the correct bins.

How can you get more information?

Contact the EPA Business Recycling Unit, Waste and Resource Recovery. Phone: 131 555 | Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au

References

¹EPA (unpub.), ‘Final Report and Attachments: Industry Specific Data Analysis of Bin Trim Round 1, 2016’, Environment Protection Authority, Sydney.

²EPA 2015, *Disposal-based Audit Commercial and Industrial Waste Stream in the Regulated Areas of New South Wales – Main Report*, NSW Environment Protection Authority, Sydney (www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/warrlocal/150209-disposal-audit.pdf).

³EPA 2016, *Social Research on Small to Medium Enterprises (SME) Waste and Recycling: Summary Benchmark Study*, NSW Environment Protection Authority, Sydney (www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/waste/small-medium-business-recycling-research-160139.pdf)