

How
to Make



Locker Cleanout



an
Environmental
Event



O K L A H O M A
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Make Locker Cleanout an Environmental Event

At least once each year, every school has to remove the remnants from lockers.



Innovative school leaders are discovering how to transform this drudgery into an environmental education event, and sometimes even a fund raiser.

A locker cleanout event can be a fun and free way to promote awareness of conservation and environmental protection by involving everyone in reducing waste and recycling. The leftovers in lockers at the end of a school term yield mountains of reusable and recyclable stuff. If the event is sponsored by a group such as student council, Key Club, or the environmental club, they may be able to recover and sell most of the discards for reuse or recycling.

The key to a locker cleanout success is organized sorting. For example, reusable items such as notebooks, pens, pencils, calculators, books, and clothing should be kept separate from the other debris. The sponsor can later sell these items in a fund-raising event. Where recycling services are available, recyclables such as aluminum, paper, and plastics can be sorted into recycling containers. Whatever the approach, a locker cleanout event can provide students with valuable experience to help them understand the large quantities of waste which we all generate, along with opportunities to learn waste reduction.

Navajo and Okmulgee Schools Locker Cleanouts are a Success

Navajo Schools held Oklahoma's first locker cleanout. The event yielded fifteen recycling bins full of paper (three



contained reusable paper or notebooks), one bag of plastic, and one bag of aluminum. One box full of reusable school supplies included seven working calculators, as well as two boxes of books. The supplies were resold by the Technology Students Association the following year. The strong commitment to recycling and reuse paid off — Navajo collected only one bag of trash.

Okmulgee High School had a similar success. The cleanout marshalled help from the local DEQ office staff as well as the Okmulgee County Conservation District. These sponsors helped provide prizes to participating students and helped attract coverage from local newspapers. In less than one hour, the Okmulgee High School Science Club collected twenty boxes of paper and one box of plastic for recycling. Reusable items included three boxes of clothes and one box of school supplies. Like the Navajo experience, this project produced but one small bag of trash.

What to Do

1

The first step in creating a locker cleanout event is to select a coordinator for the event and make arrangements for handling the trash, and, if possible, the recyclables collected during your event. Coordinators will need to make arrangements with trash collection services and recycling companies to help organize the actual cleanout process and they can also help with promotion of your cleanout event.

2

The second step is to get students involved in the cleanout. Student support and involvement in planning and conducting the locker cleanout improves success.

3

Third, inform and encourage the custodial staff about involvement in your cleanout



event. Well organized student involvement in your cleanout event minimizes extra burdens on custodial staff. Providing snacks for custodial staff and other volunteers in the event is a nice way to say “thank you”.

4

Fourth, each school should determine the most effective logistics and supervision of the cleanout. This will be your biggest challenge. For fire safety advice, check with your school’s safety expert or the local fire marshal.

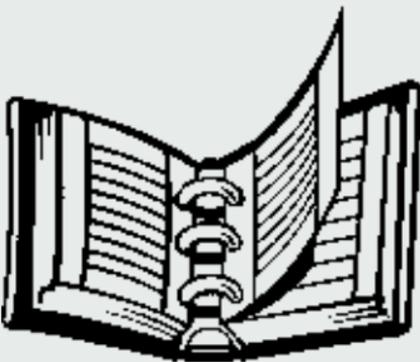
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Fifth, as students remove items from the lockers, they'll need a system to sort the reusables and recyclables from the trash. Most schools assign a teacher and class or student group to clean out a designated area of lockers. One good way to organize this part of the cleanout, is to take everything to one central area such as a fieldhouse or gymnasium. Then sort the items here as "recyclable", "reusable" or "trash". The sorted piles of recyclables, reusables and trash make great visual teaching tools.

Remember, advanced publicity is essential in making your event more successful. Issue press releases to get media coverage about how your school is showing that waste reduction is a daily activity. More importantly; newspapers, radio, and television are excellent tools to recognize students who are particularly active in the project. If recycling is part of your event, everyone can begin saving recyclables before the actual event. A locker cleanout offers opportunities for your school to reach out and become more involved in the community.



Record your results! Everyone involved wants to know how well they did. Include pictures, to help people better understand measurements, such as pounds of recyclables or cubic yards of trash. Good record-keeping helps the organizers of the next locker cleanout.



Facts About Recycling

Recycling Services

Recycling services are available. If your school is not already served by a recycling company, look for recycling opportunities by



contacting the school's trash collector, or check the telephone directory under "Recycling". The recycling

company will tell you which materials are accepted and how they must be prepared. The Department of Environmental Quality also provides an annual Recycling Directory highlighting companies which provide recycling opportunities for citizens, schools and communities.

Paper

There are many different types of paper, and each type has a different recycling use. Typically, newspaper, cardboard, computer paper, copy paper, and notebook paper may need to be separated. Work closely with your recycler to understand the separation requirements.



There are many companies in Oklahoma which make new products from your paper. It may be turned into tissue, made into part of a new cardboard box, or transformed into a variety of construction materials.

Steel



Steel is one of the most frequently recycled materials. A steel mill in Sand Springs turns scrap such as steel food cans and old cars into fenceposts and other steel construction materials.

Glass

Recycled glass melts at a lower temperature than the virgin materials which are normally used to make new glass. This means that recycling saves energy for the glass industry, reduces air emissions, and extends the life of the manufacturing



equipment. Therefore, recycling saves the glass industry money. Plants in Henryetta, Muskogee, and Sapulpa turn recycled glass into new bottles that are used by bottling companies throughout the U.S.

Compost

Most of what we throw away is composed of organic materials (food, leaves, grass clippings, nonrecyclable paper).

Composting is nature's recycling system. Through a complex interaction of bacteria, fungi, and

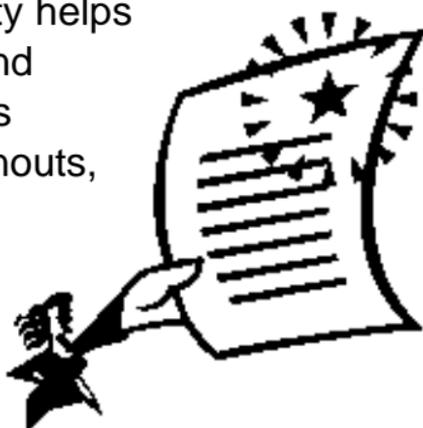
larger organisms such as earthworms, the waste materials are recycled into humus.



Humus is one of the basic building blocks of good soil, so compost is great for plants. Many schools now have special projects to demonstrate how **Worms Eat Our Garbage!**

We Can Help

The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality helps schools, teachers, and student organizations organize locker cleanouts, school recycling programs, worm composting projects, and special environmental resource days. We provide curriculum materials and technical assistance for classroom presentations and we also offer special grant programs.



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