A lot of people think Zero Waste is only about getting your trash can empty, and it isn't. While handling the “downstream” side of waste by recycling and composting everything you can is part of the solution, the real environmental and social impacts happen “upstream” before those discarded products ever reach store shelves.

For every trash can you put out at the curb, the equivalent of 71 trash cans worth of waste has already been created in the processes used to extract resources and manufacture them into products and packaging. Reducing the environmental and social impacts of these 71 cans—resource wars, pollution, deforestation, species loss, fossil fuel use, etc.—is what Zero Waste is really about, and it's a critical part of solving our climate crisis.

In fact, the EPA estimates that 42% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions come from manufacturing, transporting, and disposing of our goods and food (see article p. 4). So how do we prevent those 71 cans of waste? We go to the power of the consumer. Every purchase we make is a vote either for environmental destruction or against it. If you buy it, they will make it. If you don't, they won't. It's up to YOU.

Unfortunately, product labels don't include information like, “The clearcutting of an ancient forest went into the making of this product and as a result, many indigenous peoples were displaced.” That's why we pulled together this room-by-room guide to show you how your everyday items have some of the biggest impacts "upstream" and which eco-friendly products can replace them.

### THE WASTERS

**1. Food scraps in the trash.** Biodegradable in the landfill equals bad, bad, bad. Food in the landfill biodegrades without oxygen and creates methane, a greenhouse gas that is 72 times more powerful than CO₂ in the short term.

**2. Paper towels and napkins.** The virgin timber-based pulp and paper industry is the third greatest industrial emitter of greenhouse gases and causes the destruction of ancient forests and wildlife ecosystems in the U.S. and Canada. Chlorine bleaching used to whiten paper is a leading source of dioxin, the most toxic substance on Earth, now found in our air, water, and in the bloodstream of humans, fish and even polar bears.

**3. Plastic packaging with a #3 (PVC), #6 (polystyrene, a.k.a. Styrofoam®), or #7 (polycarbonate).** These three plastics in particular are problematic and have been known to leach harmful chemicals that can easily make their way into your body.

### THE ZERO WASTE SOLUTIONS

**1. Get a compost pail for your food and even paper scraps.** Composting creates no methane and restores our soils, the foundation of our society. While you’re at it, stick a compost bin in your bathroom and compost paper towels and tissues. Get more composting tips at ecocycle.org/compost.

**2. Get raggedy.** Replace your paper towels with sturdy rags or sponges for cleaning and replace your paper napkins with cloth ones. Having trouble letting the paper go? Buy products that contain at least 80% post-consumer recycled fiber. We recommend Seventh Generation and Natural Value brands.

**3. Skip the toxic plastics.** Our Pocket Guide to Plastics at www.ecocycle.org/guidelines/plastics can help you remember which products are more harmful than others. Choose glass containers to store foods to avoid plastic leaching.

### The Kitchen

**THE WASTERS**

1. Food scraps in the trash. Biodegradable in the landfill equals bad, bad, bad. Food in the landfill biodegrades without oxygen and creates methane, a greenhouse gas that is 72 times more powerful than CO₂ in the short term.

**THE WASTERS**

1. Virgin-content toilet paper and facial tissues. See “paper towels and napkins” in the Kitchen section. The biggest offenders with no recycled content: Target, Walmart, Quilted Northern, Angel Soft, Charmin, Scott, Kleenex, Puffs. Learn more at greenpeace.org.

2. Don’t clean with dirty air. Conventional cleaners, such as those containing ammonia, bleach or solvents, contribute to indoor air pollution, which may be 2-5 times worse than outdoor air. U.S. streams and waterways are contaminated with disinfectants and detergent compounds.

### THE ZERO WASTE SOLUTIONS

**1. Don’t flush forests: Use post-consumer recycled toilet paper and facial tissues.** Using recycled paper reduces wastewater, air and water pollution, greenhouse gases and saves energy. If every household in the U.S. replaced just ONE roll of virgin fiber toilet paper (50 sheets) with a 100% post-consumer recycled roll, we could save 423,900 trees. Most recycled-content paper is bleach-free without toxins by using hydrogen peroxide. Look for totally chlorine free (TCF) or processed chlorine free (PCF) paper with 50-80% post-consumer content. Trustworthy brands: Seventh Generation, Natural Value, 365, Earth Friendly.

**2. Use “clean” cleaners and go non-toxic.** A few safe, simple ingredients can be used in most cleaning situations, such as vinegar, baking soda, borax and dish soap. If every household replaced one 32 oz. solvent-based glass and surface cleaner with a solvent-free cleaner, we could prevent 9.3 million lbs. of volatile organic compounds from being released into the environment. Learn how you can make your own eco-friendly cleaners at www.ecocycle.org/hazwaste. Recommended non-toxic cleaning products: Seventh Generation, BioKleen, Ecover.

### On the Go

**THE WASTERS**

1. To-go cups and containers. Americans throw out more than 2.1 MILLION TONS of paper and plastic plates and cups every year. While some restaurants around town provide compostable to-go products, many still carry the oh-so-un-eco-friendly Styrofoam® (PS #6) and other icky plastics.

2. Bottled water. The bottle is recyclable but... producing the bottles for American consumption alone required the equivalent of more than 17 million barrels of oil, and that’s not including energy for transportation. It takes three liters of water to produce one liter of bottled water, twice as much as to produce tap water. Some multinational water bottlers are draining local water supplies, denying communities of their basic right to clean water.

### THE ZERO WASTE SOLUTIONS

**1. Bring your own.** Be prepared to combat this deluge of waste by traveling with a reusable stainless steel coffee mug, a cloth napkin and a set of reusable utensils, whether it’s for your lunch in the office or a trip up to the ski slopes. Bring your own to-go box—Pyrex® containers or To-Go Ware® stainless steel tiffins work great. You can also ask the restaurant to consider eco-friendlier options like compostable containers made of bagasse or plain aluminum foil.

**2. Bottle your own in a stainless steel bottle:** Stainless steel bottles can be reused countless times; look for bottles with 3-5 BPA coating. Tap water is more strictly regulated than bottled water and saves you money along with environmental destruction.