

Zero Waste



Schools

ACTIVITY GUIDE

eco-cycle®

Building Zero Waste Communities

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A note of gratitude to the dedicated and talented educators and artists that made this project possible, with the hope of contributing to a healthier planet, now and in the future, for all living things.

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Additional thanks to Kristi Meyer, Nicole Theerasatiankul, and Brinda Dewan for their contributions in completing and distributing this guide.

Funding for this project was provided by:

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Foundation**



**CARTON
COUNCIL**

Who is Eco-Cycle?

Eco-Cycle, located in Boulder County, Colorado, is one of the oldest mission-based, non-profit recycling and Zero Waste organizations in the United States. Our mission is to “innovate, implement, and advocate for local and global Zero Waste solutions to foster a more regenerative, equitable, and climate-resilient future.” Eco-Cycle’s school recycling, composting, and environmental education programs are among the most innovative and comprehensive in the nation. They have won many local, state, and national awards since the program’s inception in 1987. This *Zero Waste Schools Activity Guide* includes over three dozen different waste-reduction projects. These projects have been successfully implemented by Eco-Cycle for over three decades in preschool through high school settings.

What is Zero Waste?

Striving for Zero Waste (reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting) significantly reduces our impact on natural systems by decreasing natural resource extraction, energy and water consumption, transportation emissions, and greenhouse gas emissions. Zero Waste addresses the habits, systems, and infrastructure that determine how we make, consume, and dispose of everything that we use. Through local Zero Waste actions, we can have a direct and positive impact on some of the biggest global challenges of our time — resource depletion, air and water pollution, human health risks, and the loss of wildlife and ecosystems.

Currently, our production system is often a one-way trip for natural resources. We start by extracting resources from the Earth and manufacturing them into the things we need and want. Eventually, we dispose of these things into a dump, landfill, or as litter, fouling the land, air, and water. When we need new products, we extract more natural resources, as if there is an infinite supply. Striving for Zero Waste means extracting fewer natural resources and reusing already extracted resources over and over again.

Reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting are tools that provide tremendous benefits to the environment and to human health. They are solutions that are easy to implement and that are becoming increasingly accessible to all of us. There is no better way to change society’s wasteful habits than by educating and engaging children and their families, and there is no better time than now.

Using this Guide.

The different waste-reduction projects featured in this guide are applicable to schools, camps, and other settings that serve preschool through high school youth. The guide is arranged in four sections: *Waste-Reduction Activities*, *Recycling Activities*, *Composting Activities*, and *Motivators and Rewards*. A glossary is also included. Each chapter or project stands on its own and can be printed or downloaded separately. Combining several projects, or adding projects over time, will bring your group or school closer and closer to Zero Waste in creative and low-cost ways, diverting more and more of our planet’s precious natural resources from the landfill.