

“One or None” Paper Towel Campaign

eco-cycle

Snapshot

Tackle one of the environment’s worst enemies: disposable paper towels.



<https://bit.ly/eco-cycle-zero-waste-schools-guide>

Objective: Student and staff usage of paper towels decreases over time.

Age Groups: K-12th grade

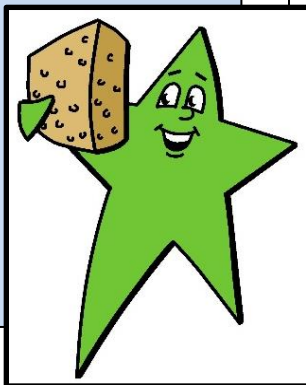
Setting: Classrooms and restrooms

Project Duration: One month or longer

Materials:

- Buckets or boxes for collecting used paper towels
- Rubber gloves for handling used paper towels
- Paper
- Markers
- Tape
- Cloth towels or rags (optional)
- Sponges (optional)

(Continued next page.)



Why This Project Matters:

Billions of pounds of paper towels are used in the U.S. every year. It is safe to say that most of these were made from virgin paper and end up in the trash. Forests around the globe are destroyed to provide us with paper towels. Using trees to produce disposable paper products destroys habitat, consumes fossil fuel energy, creates air and water pollution, and decreases the absorption of carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) by forests. Trashing paper towels increases waste and the production of methane (another greenhouse gas) when the discarded towels are entombed in landfills. Reducing paper towel consumption supports a healthier environment.

Project Summary:

It is common for kids to use more paper towels than needed during hand washing and cleaning up messes. This campaign is designed to make kids stop and think about their usage habits. Students will estimate their school’s daily paper towel consumption as well as organize school-wide messaging about where paper towels come from and their effects on the environment. The messaging is intended to encourage students to choose only one paper towel (or none) when drying hands and cleaning up.

Implementation:

1. Before starting the campaign, have students survey classrooms and restrooms to see how many paper towels are used in a day.
2. Place an extra trash can, bucket, or cardboard box in each classroom and restroom with clearly marked signage: **FOR PAPER TOWELS & TISSUES ONLY**.
3. Have students monitor these receptacles and estimate how many paper towels are used each day. Wearing gloves, they may move any incorrectly placed paper towels from the trash to the collection container and count and record the total number of towels used.

4. Create (or print samples below) and display signage on every paper towel dispenser with messages such as:
 - “Please, for the trees, only take 1!”
 - “Remember, these are made from trees!”
 - “Please use only one, then compost when done!”
 - “These used to be homes for birds. Take only what you need.”
 - “Please use wisely. Or use a sponge instead!”
 - “Save trees and forests! Use a sponge!”
 - “Use one, or none! Help save forests!”
 - “Use one or none! Save trees! Save forests!”
5. Make announcements about the campaign and the signs, including education about the non-recyclability of paper towels (towel fibers are too short to link together to make new sheets of paper). Have students research facts about the value of forests and trees to be included in the announcements and signage.
6. Have students read stories about trees and how animals depend on them. Share these stories with students in other classrooms. (See the Materials section for examples.)
7. Organize a rotation of cloth towels, donated by students or purchased at a thrift store, for use in the classroom. Parent volunteers may take them home for washing.
8. Purchase a supply of sponges for each classroom to use for cleaning off desks and countertops instead of paper towels or disposable wipes (which are non-recyclable and non-compostable).
9. Have students write letters requesting that the school district purchase single paper towel dispensers or air dryers.

Assessment:

Have the student group redistribute the receptacles labeled **FOR PAPER TOWELS & TISSUES ONLY** about a month after the start of the campaign. Determine if paper towel waste has decreased. Do this periodically throughout the school year.

Related Activities:

Paper Reduction Campaign – Chapter 6
 Repurposing in the Classroom – Chapter 12
 Making Cloth Napkins – Chapter 13

Materials:

(continued)

- Books about forests (for younger students):
 - *The Lorax*
-Dr. Seuss
 - *The Great Kapok Tree*
-Lynne Cherry
 - *The Giving Tree*
-Shel Silverstein
 - *The Tree*
-Dana Lyons
 - *The Great Paper Caper*
-Oliver Jeffers
 - *A Tree Is Nice*
-Janice May Udry
 - *Uno’s Garden*
-Graeme Base
 - *We Planted a Tree*
-Diane Muldrow
 - *The Busy Tree*
-Jennifer Ward
 - *The Tree*
-Neal Layton



Sample Signage:

For
PAPER TOWELS
& TISSUES
ONLY

 **PLEASE,** 
for the trees,
only take 1!

Remember,
these are made
from
 **TREES!** 

Extensions:

- Hold a contest between grade-levels or classrooms to see who can use the fewest paper towels in a day or in a week.
- Station student monitors by the restroom sinks to give out prize entries to kids who are “caught” using only “one or none” paper towels.
- Provide teachers with small prizes (pencils, etc.) to give students who choose to use cloth towels or sponges to clean up in the classroom.
- Start a campaign to get hand dryers installed in the school. Hold a fundraiser by selling student-made cloth napkins sets (See Chapter 13) to other students and/or families.



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what you need.

Please use wisely.



Or use
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Save trees
and forests!



Use a sponge!



Use one,
or none!

Help save
FORESTS!

Use one or none!



Save Trees! Save Forests!