

The Landfill Reduction Checklist: 10 Steps to Achieving Zero Waste

A practical checklist outlining the key steps that cities and municipalities can take to significantly reduce their landfill waste.

Achieving zero waste is an ambitious and rewarding goal that requires careful planning, community involvement, and systemic changes.

1. Set Clear, Ambitious Goals

a. Define a Zero Waste target

- i. Establish a clear timeline for achieving zero waste, such as achieving 85% diversion from landfills by 2030.

b. Set interim milestones

- i. Break down the process into smaller, measurable steps, like increasing recycling rates, reducing single-use plastics, or improving composting programs.

2. Implement Comprehensive Waste Diversion Programs

a. Expand recycling and composting programs

- i. Create convenient, city-wide systems that make it easy for residents to separate recyclables, compostables, and trash.
- ii. Provide educational campaigns to help people understand how to separate waste properly and why it's important.

3. Reduce Single-Use Plastics and Packaging

a. Ban or limit single-use plastics

- i. Implement policies to reduce plastic packaging, encourage alternatives (like compostable or reusable packaging), and reduce plastic consumption in businesses.

b. Incentivize reusable products

- i. Promote the use of reusable bags, containers, and bottles with financial incentives, or mandates for businesses to offer these alternatives.

4. Design for Circular Economy

a. Encourage businesses to design for longevity, repairability, and recyclability

- i. Work with manufacturers to produce goods that last longer and can be reused, repaired, or recycled.
- ii. Create take-back programs for products at the end of their life cycle (electronics, textiles, etc.), allowing businesses to reuse materials in the production of new products.

5. Invest in Infrastructure for Recycling and Composting

- a. Provide accessible and efficient facilities for recycling and composting, including bins for multi-stream waste collection, drop-off centers, and transportation systems for materials to processing facilities.
- b. Invest in new technologies like waste-to-fuel innovations to improve the efficiency of recycling processes and reduce contamination in recyclable materials.

6. Promote Food Waste Reduction and Recovery

- a. **Support food waste diversion programs**
 - i. Encourage or mandate businesses (like restaurants and grocery stores) to donate edible food to charities or compost organic waste.
- b. **Public awareness campaigns**
 - i. Educate consumers on reducing food waste at home, such as meal planning, proper storage, and creative ways to use leftovers.

7. Engage the Community and Stakeholders

- a. Create partnerships with businesses, schools, and community organizations to share best practices, educate, and promote zero waste principles.
- b. **Involve the public in decision-making**
 - i. Ensure the community has a say in local policies, especially regarding waste management and environmental impacts. This ensures public buy-in.

8. Implement Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Policies

- a. **Hold producers accountable**
 - i. Require manufacturers to take responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their products, including take-back programs or fees for packaging waste. This can incentivize more sustainable product designs.
 - ii. Tax or incentivize businesses based on the recyclability or wastefulness of their packaging and materials.

9. Foster Green Jobs and Economic Incentives

- a. **Create green jobs in waste management, recycling, and composting industries**
 - i. Zero waste programs create new employment opportunities, from waste auditors to recycling technicians.
- b. **Incentivize businesses to be zero waste certified**
 - i. Offer financial incentives, such as tax breaks or subsidies, to businesses that adopt zero waste practices.

10. Measure, Monitor, and Adapt

- a. **Collect data on waste streams**
 - i. Regularly measure and track how much waste is generated, diverted, and recycled, and adjust strategies accordingly.
- b. **Transparency and accountability**

- i. Provide regular public reports on progress toward zero waste goals, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement.

These steps involve a blend of policy, infrastructure, education, and community involvement. Cities and municipalities that act on all these fronts are likely to see significant reductions in waste and move toward a more sustainable, circular economy.