

## Introduction

In nature everything works in cycles with no such thing as waste. Everything produced is used by something in a constant process of decay and renewal.

This is very different to how our society currently operates. Precious resources are turned into items and packaging that are often unnecessary or break easily. After a very brief time being used, they are buried in landfills or incinerated.



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*The simplest and best solution to rubbish is not to produce it in the first place, so when looking at a product we might first ask "Do I need it?". The next question may be "Can I use this again"? After that we might consider how to recycle the materials that the product is made from and only as a last resort consider throwing it away as rubbish.*

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The following actions will help you to think in terms of **REDUCE, RE-USE** and **RECYCLE**.

At home and at work small lifestyle changes can have a large impact on the waste we create.

Your actions will be much more effective if you discuss them with the rest of your household and get them involved. One of the principles of this programme is that mutual support and encouragement both at the meetings and in the home are great helps for changing our habits.

### Why act?

## What a waste! (separate and recycle)

The average household throws out just under a tonne of waste per year, or the weight of a small car – that's over 6 kilos of waste for every person each week. Our landfill sites are nearly full and tougher laws are making it harder to open new ones. Even incinerators, which are increasingly used to burn our waste, still produce ash which needs to be landfilled. What is needed is less rubbish, not more dumps. To cut down on rubbish, flat rates began to be further phased out in 2020, and so for most people collection costs will reflect how much waste we produce. This is a great incentive to recycle and compost more, and taking the actions below can on average reduce our general waste by 70%.

### Action!

Get information on what items can be recycled. The list below now applies to most people in Ireland:

**Metal** tins and cans, **plastic** bottles, pots, trays and tubs, **paper** sheets, leaflets and newspapers, **cardboard** boxes, **cartons** for juice (collected in the recycling bin, often green). Containers that still have something in them should be emptied out and rinsed.

**Glass** bottles and jars are either collected for recycling (in a glass bin), or you can take them to a glass bank.

**Food waste** can be collected by from you for composting (in a food bin, often brown), or you can compost at home.

**Non-recyclable** waste is often collected in a black bin. This goes to landfill or for burning.

- ⇒ Have a look at [mywaste.ie](http://mywaste.ie) for further information, wherever you are nationwide.
- ⇒ Set aside containers (bags, boxes or bins) for these items and be clear as a household where things go.
- ⇒ Separate your recyclables and compost and cut down on your organic waste (see next action).
- ⇒ Take items that aren't collected in your bins to your nearest recycling site. If you're driving, it's more environmentally friendly to do this on the way somewhere else instead of making a special trip. Why not ask a neighbour if they have anything that needs taking?

### Why act?

## Let it rot! (set up a compost system)

A third of the food we buy is wasted by the average household, and nearly 40% of household rubbish is compostable. Cutting down on food waste will save bin space and landfill space, while composting the food waste we do have will make a useful garden fertiliser. Compostable waste is heavy and bulky and so with more councils introducing bag and bin weighing this is an excellent action where everyone wins!

### Action!

Have a look at how much of the waste in your bin is food- the average household spends €700 a year on food that is wasted and ends up in the bin. The Stop Food Waste campaign has plenty of ideas for how to cut down on this.

- ⇒ Install a compost bin or heap in your garden. Food waste, tea bags, coffee grounds and vegetable peelings can be collected in a small container in the kitchen and taken out to the heap every few days. Cooked food shouldn't usually be put in these bins. Waste companies provide food waste collections, useful for those of us without gardens.
- ⇒ Make or buy a wormery. Using worms to eat your compost has the advantage that cooked food can also be added. Meat and fish scraps will still have to be put in the collected compost bin, rubbish bin or fed to pets.

## Why act?

### Dispose of hazardous waste safely

Some household items are too dangerous to go in your general waste bin and need specialist recycling or disposal facilities. The list includes old medicines, paints and varnishes, garden and other chemicals, small household batteries, car batteries, waste engine oil, light bulbs and fluorescent tubes.

## Action!

Allocate a safe dry space, maybe in a shed or garage for hazardous items. Make sure children do not have access to this place. When convenient take your hazardous waste to a Civic Amenity Site/recycling centre.

## Why act?

### Carrier bags

The bag tax has been very successful, but it is still easy to be given plastic bags at the shops. Even biodegradable bags are not always compostable at home and can still be made from oil that is finite. Paper bags are more environmentally friendly, but they take trees and energy to produce and distribute so better to avoid them if possible.

## Action!

Collect a supply of reusable containers including cloth and net bags that do not take up much room and some sturdy carrying containers such as rucksacks and collapsible boxes.

- ⇒ Keep these in convenient places such as in your handbag or briefcase, car boot or by your front door. Make sure you remember to return them to the convenient place after you have unloaded the shopping.
- ⇒ Be ready to refuse bags! It's amazing how quickly you can be given them.

## Why act?

### Cut loose from single use

Items designed to be used only once are a manufacturer's dream because we have to keep coming back for more. The environmental cost of disposable items is very high since items made of many different materials are very hard to recycle. In many cases buying a reusable item will give a better quality product and save money in the long run.

By making conscious choices you can reduce the demand for energy, and materials and be a good example to other people.

## Action!

Buy reusable items instead of disposable. Examples include razors, pens, lighters, nappies and batteries.

- ⇒ Rather than buying sandwiches and drinks in disposable cups and containers, take a lunch box and flask, cup or bottle when going to work or on other outings. This will save on packaging, save you money and ensure that you eat/drink things that you like!

## Why act?

### Choose less packaging

Packaging is a major part of the waste we generate and accounts for a million tonnes a year in Ireland. Often this packaging seems totally unnecessary. Energy was used to make this packaging and energy will be needed to recycle it. Much of it cannot be efficiently recycled especially if made of different materials (e.g. juice cartons). Whether it's destined for recycling or the landfill it is you as purchaser that has to spend time and money to get rid of needless packaging.

## Action!

Choose products that use the minimum of packaging.

- ⇒ Choose items that are packed in a single material rather than many.
- ⇒ Choose items that are packaged in paper or cardboard.
- ⇒ Take opportunities to explain to shop owners why you are choosing based on packaging and encourage them to make changes to reduce the packaging on the items they sell.

Why act?

## Plastics in nature

A key strength of plastics in product design is also its biggest weakness environmentally: it takes many years to break down. Because plastics are such unnatural materials, natural processes like rotting that would break down paper, or mechanical weathering that would break down glass have an incredibly slow effect on plastic. Sunlight breaks down many types of plastics, but this makes smaller pieces of plastics that in turn take a long time to be broken down.

Another strength of plastics, in packaging is that they are very light, so plastic packaging dropped as litter can easily be blown into areas that would otherwise be quite wild, for example the world's oceans. Fragments of plastic are eaten by a wide range of marine animals, and can easily get stuck inside their digestive systems.



Action!

Don't flush anything down the toilet if you're not sure it's biodegradable. Wet wipes and cotton buds commonly cause confusion, and should go in the general waste bin unless advertised as "flushable". They can also be avoided.

⇒ Again, avoid single use plastics, as they have the potential to become marine litter.

⇒ 46% of marine litter is fishing nets! Reduce your fish consumption if you're not sure of the fishing practices used. Buying fish from a market can enable you to answer these questions.

Why act?

## Cotton on to the happy nappy

Disposable nappies are convenient, but they are very expensive. It is estimated that over €500 can be saved on just one child by using washable nappies; that's enough to buy a good quality washing machine! For a typical family with one baby, disposable nappies make up over half the rubbish. This amount will obviously be greater with more than one baby or if other recycling actions are being taken. This means that with the introduction of pay by weight charges, the savings from using washables will be even greater. Disposable nappies make up at least 4% of all household waste, taking an estimated 500 years for all parts of the nappy to break down. Also there is concern about possible disease issues from rodents and birds having contact with nappies at landfill sites.

There are now many types of reusable nappies that are more reliable and easier to use than the old terry and safety pin. Washing machines can wash at 90°C making a clean, easy, environmentally friendly, cheaper alternative to the disposable.

An easier alternative is to use environmentally friendly disposable nappies. These are made from natural materials as opposed to gels, plastics, perfumes and other chemicals in conventional disposables. Although they cost slightly more to buy, you can save money on disposal as these nappies can be safely composted.

## Action!

Purchase a set of modern cloth nappies and Velcro fix covers. Start by using them as occasional alternatives alongside the disposables and see how you get on!

- ⇒ Order a free sample pack of eco disposables. They will be delivered at no cost so you have nothing to lose! (Find out more from Ecobaby: 1850 525253 [info@ecobaby.ie](mailto:info@ecobaby.ie) [www.ecobaby.ie](http://www.ecobaby.ie))

## Why act?

### Two sides are better than one!

How often do you only use one side of a piece of paper? That's only half its life! It takes 17 trees to make 1 tonne of paper and lots of energy getting the trees to the mill, making the paper and getting it to the shop, etc.

## Action!

Collect scrap paper that has only one side used for example letters and junk mail that does not need to be kept.

- ⇒ Identify situations and places in which scrap paper would be quite adequate for the job and leave collected paper in these places. Examples might include shopping lists and paper for the kids to scribble on.
- ⇒ Envelopes can often be reused. Clean labels can be placed over old addresses.

## Why act?

### Junk Mail

Every day you probably receive flyers, coupons, and special offers. Many of these go straight into the bin. Even if they go into the recycling bin it still wastes energy for the paper to go 'round the loop' in this way.

## Action!

Opt to get your bills online if possible and find alternative ways to get information sent to you.

- ⇒ Make a notice saying 'please no junk mail' and have a friendly word with your postman.
- ⇒ When junk mail does arrive write "return to sender", and put it back in the post. Alternatively you can return the junk mail in the pre-paid envelope that they provide. It is your right under the 1988 Data Protection Act to have your name removed. For persistent junk mail you may need to drop an e-mail to the company sending it to ask them to remove you from their list.
- ⇒ There are two registers as part of the electoral register. If you are on the "edited register" as well as the main one, you are likely to receive unsolicited junk mail. To find out whether you are on this list check on [www.checktheregister.ie](http://www.checktheregister.ie). If you want to opt out of the edited register, contact your local authority, where the register is maintained.
- ⇒ Re-use the reverse side of junk mail that does get through as scrap paper and recycle the remainder.

## Why act?

### The tissue is the issue

Paper napkins for the dinner table or that come with takeaway food amount to a substantial use of paper. Likewise paper kitchen towels and tissues all add up to lots of paper and therefore trees being used. A more durable, reusable cloth product will often do as an alternative.

## Action!

Use cloth napkins for the dinner table.

- ⇒ Only let takeaway staff give you the amount of paper you need rather than the masses they often try to give you.
- ⇒ Use reusable cloths for the kitchen and cut down on kitchen roll use.
- ⇒ Use cotton handkerchiefs, or make your own from squares of old T-shirt, they will last you for years!
- ⇒ Reuse old cotton clothes as floor cloths and rags for the garage and workshop.

## Why act?

### Get it mended

Chances are you have items that are not being used because they need a minor repair. Keeping an old item in service a bit longer reduces the need for a new item to be manufactured and reduces the strain on the disposal or recycling facilities.

## Action!

Make a list of all the broken items in your house.

- ⇒ Separate into what can be realistically mended and those beyond repair. Recycle as much as possible from the latter.
- ⇒ Make a plan with dates and times to mend the ones that you can easily mend yourself.
- ⇒ Using friendly contacts or the Golden Pages get quotes for repairing items beyond your ability. If an item is too costly to fix, consider whether any charity could use it. Failing this recycle what you can from it.

## Why act?

### Trash or treasure?

Are your wardrobes, toy cupboards and store rooms overflowing with things that you never use? Your rubbish might be someone else's gold! Every item that gets reused reduces demand at the creation and disposal ends of the chain. Let's make things last as long as possible.

## Action!

Gather up clothes and items that you do not use anymore.

- ⇒ Offer these items to friends who might be able to use them.
- ⇒ Donate items to your local charity shop or offer on 'Freecycle'.
- ⇒ You might consider putting an advert on your local noticeboards or via online selling sites to sell things that you no longer need, or maybe take them to a car boot sale.



Action	I will take this action before the next meeting	Action taken
Talk about these waste actions with the rest of your household		
Set up a waste separating system in your kitchen, garage or shed		
Set up a hazardous waste storage system		
Take recyclable items to a recycling site		
Set up a compost system		
Collect and use reusable shopping bags and boxes		
Choose reusable items rather than disposable		
Choose products with less packaging		
Purchase and use washable nappies		
Order a free sample pack of environmentally friendly disposable nappies		
Take a packed lunch and flask/bottle/cup		
Collect used paper and use the other side		
Put up a 'No junk mail' sign		
Send back junk mail		
Avoid paper tissues, kitchen towel and napkins		
Use cloths and sponges rather than kitchen roll		
Reuse old clothes as rags for the kitchen and workshop		
Get broken items mended, or fix them yourself		
Give away or sell things you don't need		
Clean up some litter		
Talk to someone about this programme		
Take a community action		

**Thank you for participating in this course. You can find links to other resources and further information from each session at [www.cef.ie/projects/greenerliving](http://www.cef.ie/projects/greenerliving)**