



Worksheet: Visual Waste Audit

*Conducting a waste audit (or waste sort) is one method that researchers use to assess how much **recycling potential** exists in a solid waste stream. A waste audit involves taking randomly selected samples of a generator's garbage stream, sorting out the recyclable materials from the non-recyclable materials, and then categorizing and quantifying recyclable materials by type.*

Materials Needed

- Tarp or another flat surface that can be easily cleaned
- Gloves or tongs
- Waste Audit Tally Sheet (and something to write with)
- Long Beach Recycling and Refuse Guidelines
- About one day's worth of garbage from your home

Key Steps

Step 1. Prepare your study area

Clear a spot on the ground, either outside or in an area that can be easily swept clean, such as concrete or tiled floor. Lay down an old sheet, tarp, or flattened garbage bag to serve as your study area.

Step 2. Select your study sample

Select a "representative sample" of the garbage produced in your home, such as the contents of your primary garbage container at the end of a normal day. If your household does not produce much waste, you may want to wait two or three days to have enough material to sort through.

Step 3. Characterize the materials in your sample

Once you have selected a sample that has plenty of items to sort, spread it on the sheet or tarp that you prepared in Step 1. Examine the materials on the tarp closely and **tally each item you see** using the Plastics, Paper, Metal, and Glass item types described in the City's Recycling Guidelines. For all other items, you can use the Waste Audit Tally Sheet below to make this step easier.

Visual Audit Tally Sheet

	Material	Type	Tally	Total
RECYCLABLES	Plastic	Plastic bottles		
		Plastic jugs		
		Plastic tubs		
	Paper	Cardboard / boxes		
		Other paper		
	Metal	Aluminum		
		Metal cans		
	Glass	Glass bottles		
Glass jars				

TOTAL RECYCLABLE CONTENT

NON-RECYCLABLES	Trash	(Reference the City's Refuse Guidelines)		
	Organic waste	Food scraps		
		Yard debris		
	Household Hazardous Waste	E-waste		
		Batteries		
		Lightbulbs		
		Paint		
		Household cleaners		
Other				

TOTAL NON-RECYCLABLE CONTENT

When finished, place the items from your sample in their appropriate containers.

Step 4. Share your results to educate, motivate, and inspire change!

Even the most diligent recyclers can be surprised by the number of recyclable items in their trash. Knowing which types of recyclables are “most missed” in your household can make it easier to stay alert, offer quick reminders, and establish better habits. You can even challenge your household to measurably improve their results by scheduling a second waste audit a week or more later. If your results were already satisfactory, you can aim for less waste overall!