

What's in your trash? Waste audits reveal 77% of "trash" is NOT trash at all.

Have you looked in your trash lately? Understanding what is in your waste stream is key to helping you reduce, reuse and recycle effectively.

In a [survey of 100 waste audits conducted nationwide](#), Great Forest, a sustainable waste management consultancy, found that 77% of materials the average commercial office throws out was really NOT trash at all, but made up of recyclable and compostable materials. Only about 23% was real "trash, with the rest made up of organics (34%), followed by paper (23%), glass/metal/plastic (19%), and e-waste (1%).

That is a lot of lost value. And a lot of costly waste.

Waste audits generate data that gives a business, organization or building insight into their operations. A waste audit can reveal what is working or not working in a waste and recycling management program. It can uncover breakdowns, expose wasteful problems or confirm successes. This enables companies to make adjustments to improve or boost their waste reduction efforts. Here are some examples:

- One company reduced their waste load by 25% after implementing an organics program when a waste audit revealed that a large percentage of their trash was made up of food scraps.
- Another company decided to eliminate disposable coffee cups after a waste audit revealed that nearly 30% of their waste volume was made up of these cups. Instead, they encouraged employees to bring in reusable mugs.
- One large financial institution began a series of recycling training sessions after a waste audit revealed that 22% of their trash consisted of recyclables. A follow-up waste audit a year later showed that the amount of recyclables in their waste stream had dropped to 15%, meeting their sustainability goals for improvement. The audit results were also a morale booster for their employees, who were delighted to learn that their efforts were making a measurable difference.
- A waste audit at a global consumer products brand uncovered a [sizable new revenue stream](#)--a large amount of cardboard and plastic wrap that was not being captured for baling. In addition, the brand was poised to see a potential savings of up to 33% of its annual waste hauling costs.

How important are waste audits? In December 2018, San Francisco passed an ordinance requiring the city's largest waste generators [to conduct waste audits every three years](#). The goal? To increase compliance, reduce materials going to the landfill, help cut waste costs and move the city towards its zero waste goals. Approved unanimously, San Francisco's measure speaks volumes about the importance and benefits of waste audits, and businesses everywhere should recognize it too.

