Activity: Personal Waste Audit

**Goal:** The goal for this exercise is to become aware of the total amount of waste you generate in a 24-hour period. After you obtain an understanding of your personal waste, try and reduce this volume. Very little of what we send to the landfill is actually “trash.” How can we minimize the waste being sent to the landfill?

**Day 1:** You will carry three bags around with you for the entire day. In the first bag, you will collect all of the “trash” items that you generate throughout the day. In the second bag, you will collect all of the “recyclable” waste items that you generate. In the third you will collect all the “compostable” items. At the end of the day, record all of the waste that you generated for the day. Remember to include every item, even if it is small or personal. Identify which items were compostable, recyclable, or landfill.

**Day 2:** After you have an understanding of the types of waste you are personally generating, try to reduce this volume. For the purpose of this activity, we will not include sewage or energy waste, but you should now be thinking about all the waste each of us generates in a day. Every day we throw away our personal waste, we let water run down the drain, and we leave on lights all around us. We are individually only one person, but together, we are generating A LOT of waste.

**Next Step:** Once you have collected your personal waste over the 24-hour period, take a picture of your three sorting bags and email it to recycle@umd.edu. Everyone who participates will receive a prize and be entered into a drawing for a sustainability gift bag.

Final date to submit pictures is **Monday, April 2nd**.

**Questions?** Email recycle@umd.edu
Reflection Questions:

1. Where does the majority of your waste come from?
2. How can you reduce the amount of waste you generate? (see tips below)
3. Why is it important to be mindful of our waste?
4. Other than our personal (post-consumer) waste, what other types of waste is there?

Waste Reduction Tips:

- Cut out plastic bags!
  - Instead of baggies, invest in reusable containers. These are available in all shapes and sizes. They now come in plastic, glass, and metal. Think about the types of items that you typically pack in small baggies and choose containers that can hold the same types of items.
  - Carry a reusable tote bag to use if shopping. These can be purchased at most grocery stores. These are also frequently handed out at events on campus such as First Look Fair.

- Stop using disposable paper products!
  - Use cloth rags instead of paper towels.
  - Carry a cloth napkin and handkerchief.

- Use a refillable water bottle!
  - Over 100 bottle filling stations are already on campus and even more are in the process of being installed.
  - Bottled water costs much more than tap water. Using a water filling station on campus is FREE.
  - Tap water is regulated by the FDA, whereas between 60% - 70% of bottled water sold in the US is unregulated [NRDC]
  - Americans use 1,500 bottles of water every second [Treehugger].

- Use a refillable coffee mug!
  - Dining Services offers a $0.20 discount whenever you bring your own cup or mug. This is true in all of the convenient stores and dining satellite operations.

- Buy in bulk!
  - Whenever items are bought in bulk, there is less packaging waste. When appropriate buy in bulk.
  - Remember to consider expiration dates when buying in bulk. Allowing food to go bad in the refrigerator can also generate a lot of waste!

- Recycle plastic bags and film!
  - Create a “bag of bags” in your home or office.
  - Collect all plastic bags, plastic wrapping, bubble wrap, clean cellophane, etc. in one bag. When full, tie the bag and deliver it to a local grocery store.

*There are many other ways to reduce our waste. What other ways can you think of?*