

Hi everyone: I few thoughts come to mind:

- When you eat out, the waste you take away is likely a small portion of the total waste. Have you ever worked in a restaurant? There's lots thrown away from the kitchen.
- If you live in a place that doesn't recycle, you can still recycle and compost your own stuff by dumping it in a neighbor's bin on your way to school each day. If you try this, please let me know what it's like.

Thanks, Pete

Reflections follow

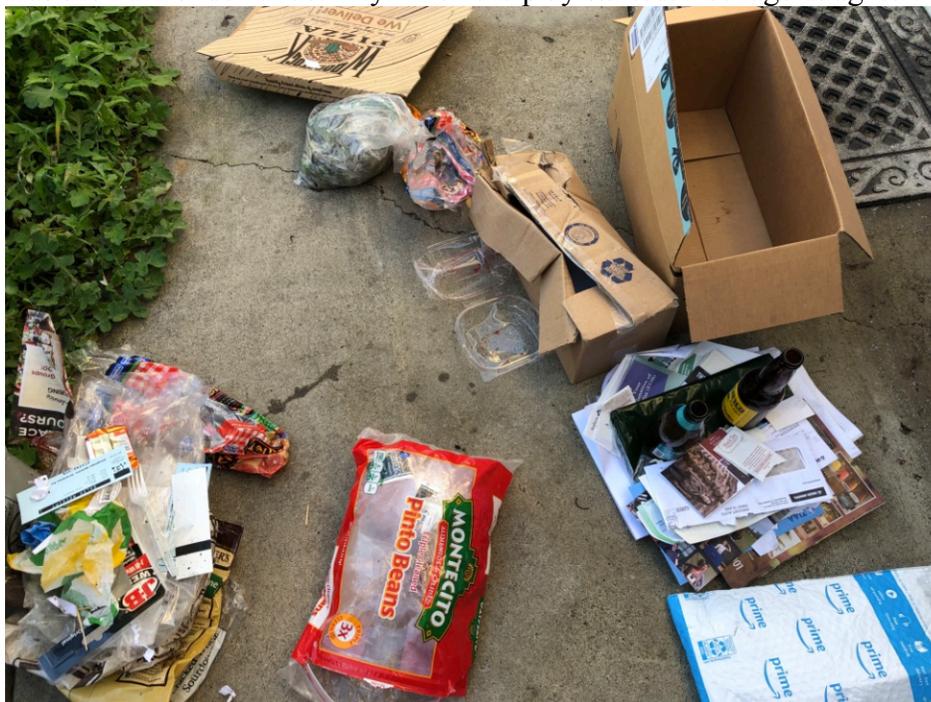
Pete Schwartz:

Clockwise from left are landfill including dirty plastic bags, compost including one pizza box, recyclables, Amazon packaging, and clean plastic bags.

The dirty plastic bags have been used several times: first with the purchase of bread (for instance), then for taking my lunch to school, and whatever else.

The pizza box is a first-time experiment. I *think* it should compost, but am not sure.

The compost in the bag presents some "boundary" issues. We have loads of fruit that isn't really good... unripe guavas that just rot.... Like 20 lbs per week. I just put them in the compost – I'm not accountable for yard waste that never was food. However, the bag is full of pineapple guavas that *were* very good, and I *should have* eaten before they went bad. Letting them rot is something I *do* hold myself accountable for. The Amazon packaging material is from laboratory purchases I made for our research. Am I responsible for this? Regardless, I took the Amazon packaging to the bicycle kitchen where they will reuse it to send bicycle parts. Then there's the rest of the family. How much am I responsible for our collective use? There were multiple failures when I'd forget... being out in public was the most difficult. My daughter, her friend, and I left Woodstocks one evening to go to a play in a hurry. The buss boy grabbed most of our stuff before I could stop him... I didn't try very hard. I got two containers of food, which we emptied. When I sat down in the play, I folded up the containers to stuff them into the pockets of my jacket. The woman next to me told me that I could have thrown them in the trash... "uh, my students and I do this self intervention...". She responded in delight that raising our awareness was *such* a wonderful activity. Then the play started. Teenage daughter: mortified.



Nick Kubas

I have been saving a trash bag full of last week's (and some of this week's) garbage that I will now take some time to reflect upon. I did not think I would generate much trash at the beginning of the week, and I followed through on that belief. I cook most of my meals and don't purchase that much. I rarely ever print paper. What surprised me a great deal was how worthless my trash was. All I could see were those little plastic bags I put vegetables in at Ralph's; containers for sour cream, kielbasa, and toilet paper; and the occasional drier sheet and gum wrapper. As hard as I tried to reduce my waste by cooking, I still contributed a decent bit to the world's growing, useless heap of trash. This frustrated me as I figured that there is just something inherently wrong with the way we package our goods. I know packaging works for the purpose of convenience, but what should I do with the wrapping on my toilet paper rolls? What do I do with my tub of sour cream. I've been raised to believe that only certain types of plastic are recyclable, and living at a fraternity house does not give me a clear option for recycling my plastic. My first thought is not to bag my vegetables when I buy them at the supermarket, as this saves between 3-5 bags per trip. Nevertheless, I'll have to think about other solutions for the various other kinds of food I eat. This will be on my mind for a while. I knew this reflection would make me think, but I didn't know what I would think about until I went through that trash bag.



Mallory Duarte

Throughout my intervention, I learned that I should be more conscious of my paper product waste. I used to pride myself in thinking that I produced less trash than my fellow peers, but was humbled to realize that I should address paper product waste the same way I do with plastic. I could start using cloths as napkins and paper towels. Furthermore, I did not choose to sort through the bottom of my trash bag because it was mixed in with my moldy food scrap waste (Ew!). Also, I realized that eating eating takeout produces large amounts of trash, so I am going to avoid doing this from now on. (Conveniently, I did not eat takeout this past week, and am convinced that is also a main reason why my trash is smaller than I would have thought).



Laura Haller submitted no picture, but this statement:

Tackling this week with tracking my waste was again a very interesting and difficult challenge. Because I had done this before, I knew how much waste I could potentially collect so I decided to be as fruitful as possible. I kept a thermos in my backpack instead of buying paper coffee cups, I kept napkins that I found at home from other times eating out, I brought shopping bags and reusable bags to buy grains and other items in bulk, and I brought reusable cutlery as well. I chose to not eat snacks that had waste and my biggest waste came from vegetable packaging from stores. I bought most without plastic from California Fresh but there were a couple that I bought like Hummus and dates which came in a plastic container. I stayed pretty waste free this week, which taught me that it is not very difficult to reduce waste if you really set your mind to it. It is more inconvenient but worth it. I felt a lot more satisfied and eco-friendly than I did at the end of the project last quarter.

My week ended early though, with my trip to Boston. I was waste free except for the waste created when I ate at the cafeteria at Boston College. Eating out other than at the cafeteria did not create waste. It blew my mind because most people at the school eat on campus because they don't have a car to take them to restaurants farther. It was so interesting seeing the amount of waste, especially because the cafeterias mainly served their food in plastic. This was crazy to me and although they had recycling, compost, and trash bins, there was still so much waste that could have been avoided by serving their food on reusable plates and silverware. My question was whether or not the amount of fuel/CO₂ emissions saved by lack of transportation by car equaled out the amount of trash-waste created by the cafeterias. It was interesting to see and I told my friend who goes to school there to talk to his classmates and teachers and figure this out!

Lizzie Reed provided no narrative, but the well documented picture below. I guess you'll have to ask her what it was like.



Sean Weisman



I collected my trash for a full week, beginning Saturday, January 12 and ending Saturday, January 19. The left pile is what I believed could be recycled, the middle—regular trash, and the right—compostable (corn husks). I adjusted several habits to limit my trash accumulation and having to carry it around, such as only getting Red Radish in the University Union for lunch, which leaves me with only the paper my salad wrap is put in. This is much less than the foil and coated paper Chick-fil-A sandwiches and fries come in and includes no plastic, unlike sauce packets. I waited until now, Tuesday night, to write this to see how quickly my habits would change back, and I must admit to having gotten Chick-fil-A and used several sauce packets. It would be beneficial if there were a system that ensured food-contaminated plastics could be cleaned and then recycled, rather than requiring they be put in the trash. However, certain plastics cannot be recycled regardless. My main takeaway from this, and something I had already been aware of, is that we continue to do things we feel guilty about but do not feel enough pressure to change.

Ava Mathews

I found this self-intervention easier than I was expecting. It was not as much of an inconvenience as I thought it was going to be, I only had to change my habits slightly, and keep reminding myself not to throw anything away. I kept everything in two plastic bags in my room, so as not to disturb my roommates. One was for recyclables one for trash. I tried not to eat out at places that would generate a lot of trash and comes in non-reusable containers, because I knew I would then have to carry it the rest of the day. Instead, I cooked more at home using pans and dishes. I tried to keep any amount of trash I did produce while out of the house small. I had a general idea of how much trash I produced per week, so I was not really surprised by the results. I think this was an important experience, because if everyone saw how much trash they generated in just one week they might be more mindful about what they're throwing away, and ways they could reduce their waste.



The Week I Carried my Trash



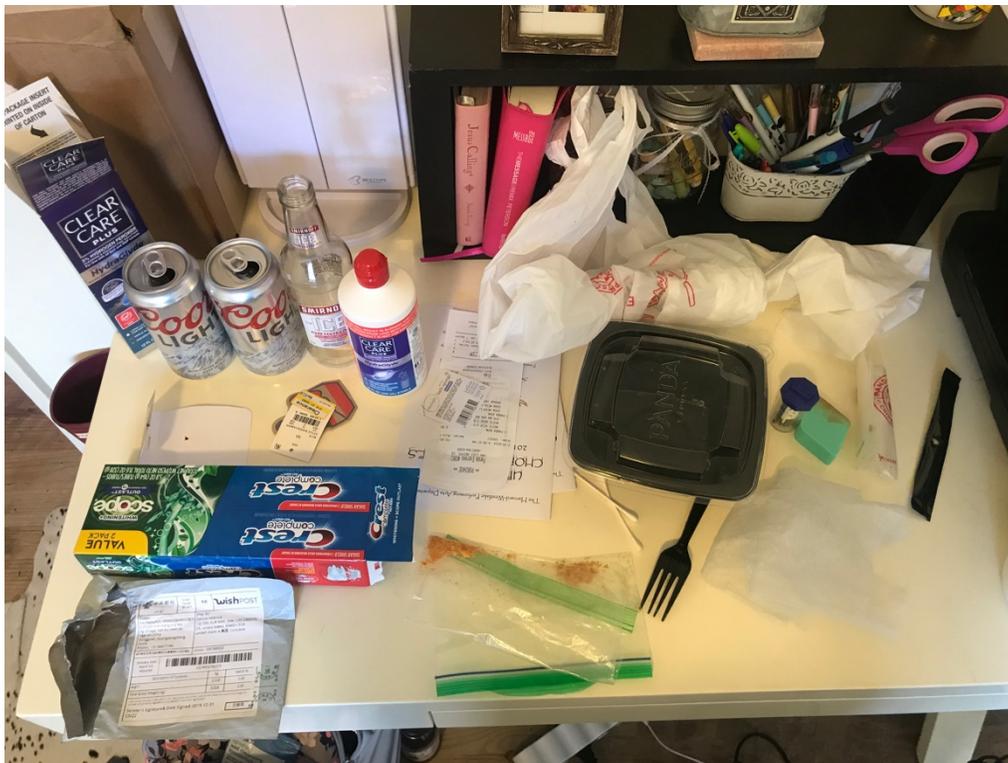
Over the course of the last week I have saved all the trash I have used. I will admit I had to start over a couple times and got sick during the week and there was a point I stopped saving all my tissues because it was not sanitary. Through this experience I learned a few things, one I eat a lot of cereal and two it's easy to not notice how much trash you really use.

Knowing I was going to have to participate in this self-intervention I did everything I could to not accumulate trash. I put my lunches in Tupperware instead of bags, so I didn't have to save the bag, or I went as far as mooching off my roommates' meals, so I didn't have to create my own trash. Now that was probably cheating, and a portion of their trash was mine now and not showed here but the awareness is.

My takeaway from this activity was the awareness of how much trash I accumulate as well as places I can cut back on it. Something I got out of this week that I wasn't expecting was to put less food on my plate. I didn't want to have to keep any food I was going to throw out so I made sure I could eat everything on my plate. Now the down side to this was I was less inclined to eat food that had a pit or core or skin that was compostable and had to be removed, so I didn't eat as healthy. The one item I use the most excessively is paper towels. By the end of the week there were many paper towels in my pile, and many were barely used. Those can easily be replaced by a towel or cloth than can be washed and reused.

Although I am not going to continue to keep my trash, I will be more conscious as I go through my day. I'll watch how many paper towels I use, make sure to bring a reusable water bottle, get one of the reusable K-cups for my Keurig. There are many ways I can reduce the amount of trash I make throughout the day.

Danica Valencia



This is what the end of my week looked like. Clearly I slipped up a few times so this is not exactly everything that I had the potential to throw away throughout the week. I was surprised outside of this how much little trash I had compared to what I thought I was going to have I drew my line at food items, such as the leftover ride in the panda express container. I did not have an issue with water bottles or plastic utensils besides the one. My roommates and I never buy water bottles or plastic utensils because we have plenty forks and spoons and we all use yeti water bottles and coffee cups. I am not going to lie having a bag of trash sitting in my room was not too much fun but this activity definitely made me self aware at the amount of items we throw away every day. I especially noticed how much packaging goes into toiletries. Just from one jar of contact solution, I had three different items to throw away. I work downtown at Tails Pet boutique here in SLO and every time we get Puppia harnesses in, they are all individually wrapped with plastic. This was the first time that company wrapping came into my head. We as a community can do all that we possibly can to decrease our trash, but it has to be large companies like Crest, Clear Care contact solution, and Puppia harnesses that have to improve their packaging to decrease what we throw away to really make an impact. I could see something like that happening in the near future and it will help our planet tremendously. But most importantly I think the point of this project was to assist us in becoming more environmentally friendly and aware. I know, at least for me, this project exceeded at sharing that message!

Abby Bullen

This week, I did not throw what I would consider "trash" away. This means anything I would normally throw in a trash, recycling, or compost bin was collected and separated so that I could inspect my waste habits.

I have always considered myself conscious of single use plastics and try my best to avoid them. My arsenal of reusables that I keep on hand at all times in either my backpack or purse includes my large water bottle, coffee/smoothie tumbler and aluminum straw, bamboo utensils and compact shopping bag.



Even though I normally consider waste when purchasing anything, I found myself feeling pressure to change my purchasing habits as I collected trash throughout the week. For example, the groceries I normally get from Trader Joe's come with a lot of packaging. Some of the quick meals and snacks I grab from the store allow me to cook at home when I am short on time or bring to class/work, instead of spending money to eat out. These foods, including cheese sticks, tamales, pasta, microwavable meals, usually have a box, tray or plastic wrapper that cannot be re-purposed like a yogurt container could, and so they inevitably go to landfill. Something I would like to try to improve this waste is to start meal-prepping by buying/cooking in bulk and freezing portions to heat up when I am short on time. This could help me reduce waste, save even more money, and eat healthier.

My waste for one week is pictured below. Another habit I noticed is that I drink a lot of tea and Emergen-C drinks. Some of the tea bags I buy do not come individually wrapped in plastic/aluminum and some do. Even the ones that are not individually wrapped (just the tea bags in a box) still come with the paper tea-bag waste. I realized that it is a very easy switch for me to buy loose leaf tea and a tea strainer. I stumbled upon The Secret Garden in downtown SLO this weekend and purchased a couple of my favorite teas in bulk, which I now store in mason jars. It felt good to make such a simple change to reduce my waste and support a local business in the process.





I created a considerable amount of food-waste in a week, with eggshells, coffee grounds, edamame shells, orange and grapefruit peels, apple cores, carrot/zucchini ends, etc filling up half a grocery bag. I looked into SLO's composting service and unfortunately found that they do not serve my apartment complex, so I searched for apartment-sized indoor composting bins and purchased a \$22 1.3 gallon composting bin to keep in my kitchen. Hopefully this will be effective and not smelly in my tiny apartment :)

Overall, I am glad that I was able to track my waste for a week so that I could inspect my habits and reduce my waste where I could. I would like to keep tracking my waste-- a little less intensely-- for the remainder of the quarter to see if I can keep making changes and reduce my single-use plastic/paper waste as much as possible.

Here, my waste is separated into recyclables, compost, and landfill. Each category makes up about a third of my waste. I would like to eliminate the landfill category altogether by the end of this year.



Fig. 1: My trash production for 1 week. Right half is trash, left half is recycling.

I began the week expecting to find a large and rapidly growing mass of trash and food waste in my bags. My inner narrative consists of me being the stereotypical, wasteful, and ignorant American. As a principle, I try to be harder on myself than is necessary because I believe it makes me more willing to change and be conscious of my actions.

By the fourth day of my vow to save all waste that I create, I found myself unable to grasp that I had only saved a handful of granola bar wrappers, several receipts, and a plastic bag which previously contained uncooked pasta. After finding this I engaged in some self reflection. Perhaps I had forgotten about the intervention completely and had been mindlessly returning to my routine of throwing away my trash. Had I been saving the trash somewhere else, and had simply misplaced it? Upon an effortful recall of my previous days I found that my seemingly miniscule amount of trash was, in fact, all that I had created.

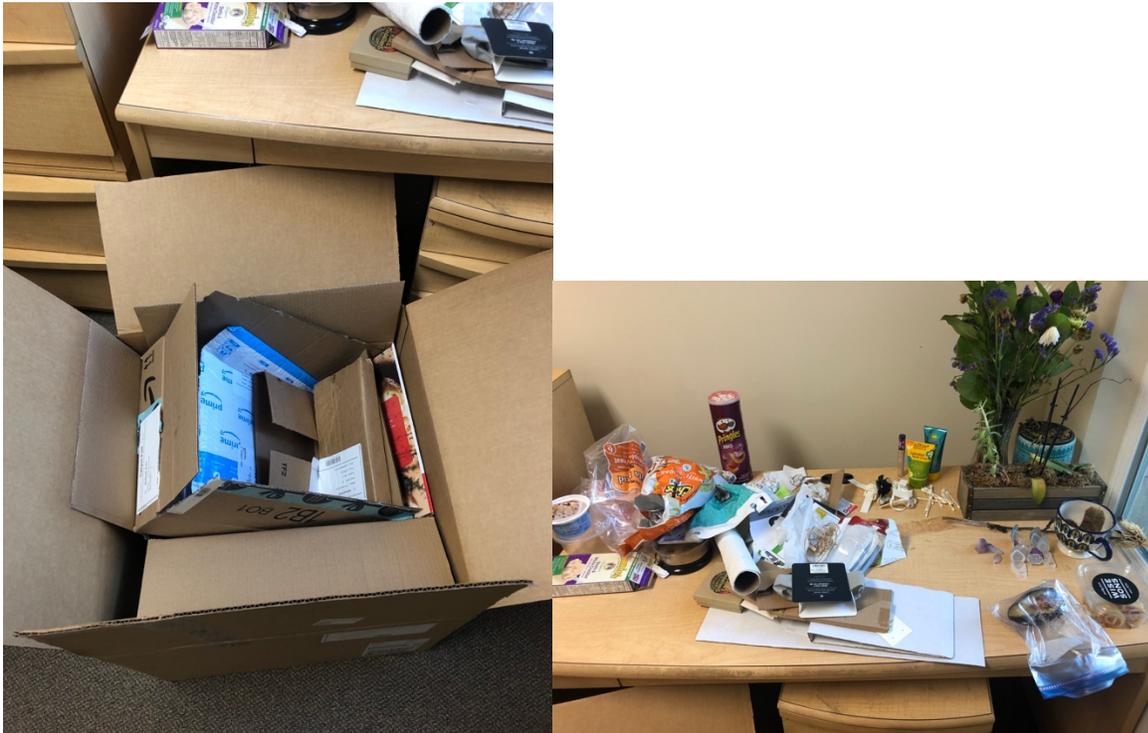
This realization came as a surprise to my chronically pessimistic mind. A history of an environmentally aware mother working for the Sierra Club and news outlets telling me that the planet is dying from pollutants, have resulted in myself mindlessly making all efforts to reduce my trash creation. Upon some more reflection, I realized that the vast majority of my physical, landfill destined trash comes from my groceries. Much of my food comes wrapped in plastic. The remaining part of my disposal is over long periods. Things that only get thrown out rarely and would not reveal themselves in only one week of close observation (e.g. clothing, soap containers, 5 pound bags of Costco trail mix).

Finally I came to see the reason for the lack of trash not related to food. My life consists of reusable containers and bags, and bulk purchased foods. I bring my lunch to campus in a tupperware container, I use chico bags at the grocery stores, carry water in a reusable bottle, and I don't eat outside the house. Without consciously aware of it, I have minimized the amount of trash I create in everyday life by making small efforts in small parts of my life.

The rest of my week continued the pattern and I only ended up with a single, small bag of trash. I am fairly surprised by this activity and the insight it has given me. I am glad I was able to partake in it. And, I'm sure I can reduce my trash creation even more, though I don't currently have any ideas as to how.

Unnamed Student

Self-Intervention



Above, are the images of all the garbage I created this week. The first photo is of cardboard boxes that came when I ordered all of my textbooks. That can be recycled, or I'll ask my roommates who are architecture majors if they want it. In the second photo I've organized my other waste from trash on the left, to recycling in the middle, to compost on the far right. This week started off with me having a lot of packages mailed to me because I ordered my textbooks online this quarter. My mom also sent me a toaster oven that arrived Friday which meant I had to handle a huge box all week. I felt pretty bad about creating that waste. I don't usually buy my textbooks online and I didn't realize how much waste was produced in ordering things online and having them shipped to you. I was surprised by how little food waste I created but not at all surprised by how much food packaging waste there was. I know that I bought a lot of processed foods, but it was interesting to see that I mostly ate all of it. This week was also different than usual because I was moving rooms. I created a lot of waste from all the command strips that I pulled off my wall and then from the peely part on the back of the fresh command strips that I used. While I was putting them up, I thought to myself "If only I was allowed to nail things into the wall here, then I wouldn't be creating so much waste." So that was a pretty eye opening during my week. This week I learned that there are a lot of places in my life where I can cut down on waste. I knew that I needed to stop buying processed foods that come in packaging but now maybe I'll actually do that now that I've seen how much waste they produce in just a week. If I was going to create this same amount of waste every week, at the end of my lifetime there would be an astonishing amount of packaging. I also learned that it's probably a lot better for the environment if I don't buy my textbooks online. I disliked how much cardboard waste was created and how much fuel it probably took to get to me. All in all, this was a pretty eye-opening experience for me.

Denisse Almaguer

From the beginning, I knew that I would have a lower accumulation of trash than the average person. Since my pile made me question my own consumer existence, I am now horrified when I walk around any public place. The amount of trash that Cal Poly accumulates in a day is astounding – and the amount of trash the world creates in a day makes me truly depressed. We live in such a consumer society that was cemented as American culture in the prosperity of the 1950s. Socially, we have never really taken stock of what each individual can produce, be it trash or any kind of waste. Now I had a chance to see what it costs to be me. I have always been a passionate recycler and anti-litterer. But this project actually helped me develop the skill of reducing my waste. I have always had the power to say no, and it became time to use that power. No, I don't want to go to a fast food place and force myself into buying bad food wrapped in trash. I was hyperaware of the trash I created and how it would outlast my time on earth. It's unfair that we have not found a better way to deal with our waste. We need to innovate, both our process of manufacturing and the process of disposal. Although I won't see this eco-conscious transition take place, I can do my part and live a better, more resourceful life. I hope I can spread the message of reducing to my friends, family, and anyone who will actually listen.





COMPOST

TRASH

Sydra Gianassi

Day 1 started off strong. Thinking about holding all of my trash not only kind of grossed me out but brought the lazy side out of me. Breaking it to my very clean and neat roommate that I was going to have to carry around our trash and leaving it in my room almost gave her a stroke. She is a big homebody and a little judgmental so this is not her cup of tea. After a half an hour of compromising we separated our trash so she can still clean and I can see what I am throwing away. Day 2 didn't start so strong. I completely forgot about it until Day 4 when I looked down at my hand where I wrote "Keep All Trash". So I started over. I work at a coffee shop so I excluded that from my study because I am paid to use electricity and waste coffee grounds for 8 hours a day. By the end of the journey I realized how hard it was to keep on top of keeping my waste. Every time I would use something I instantly threw it away. I would say that my experiment was a big failure. I forgot about this intervention all the time just with the fast pace of my life. I had to force myself to slow down and take in what I was doing that day and where I was. I also learned that society is so against wasting things but also against the measures to stop wasting. I had a lot of friends come up to me and ask what I was doing with trash and after explaining it to them they would always say "That is awesome! But I would never do that." Compost just became a new thing so if we can incorporate that into apartment buildings or student housing maybe Cal Poly can start seeing the benefits of less waste. Reduce Reuse and Recycle!



Unnamed Student



Where do I start? Well this was definitely an experience that will stay with me forever. By being aware of my personal waste, it's has certainly molded my thoughts in a different way, it has helped me make positive environmental decisions on a daily basis. I don't want to sound pessimistic, and believe me I'm optimistic in many situations, but when It comes to waste on a global level, I'm not really sure what we can do about it. We're consuming at such an unprecedented level that we're not even aware of it. Yes, a small percentage of our human population do care, and more than half of the population don't even have access to clean water. My main takeaway from this experience is that I really want to be a part of an environmental group and try to contribute as much as I can to make this world a better place. I won't be able to do everything, but I know that I can do something, after all something is always better than doing nothing.

I think this was the least amount of trash I've produced for a week in my entire life, and it was simple because I was aware of how many pieces of waste I was generating.

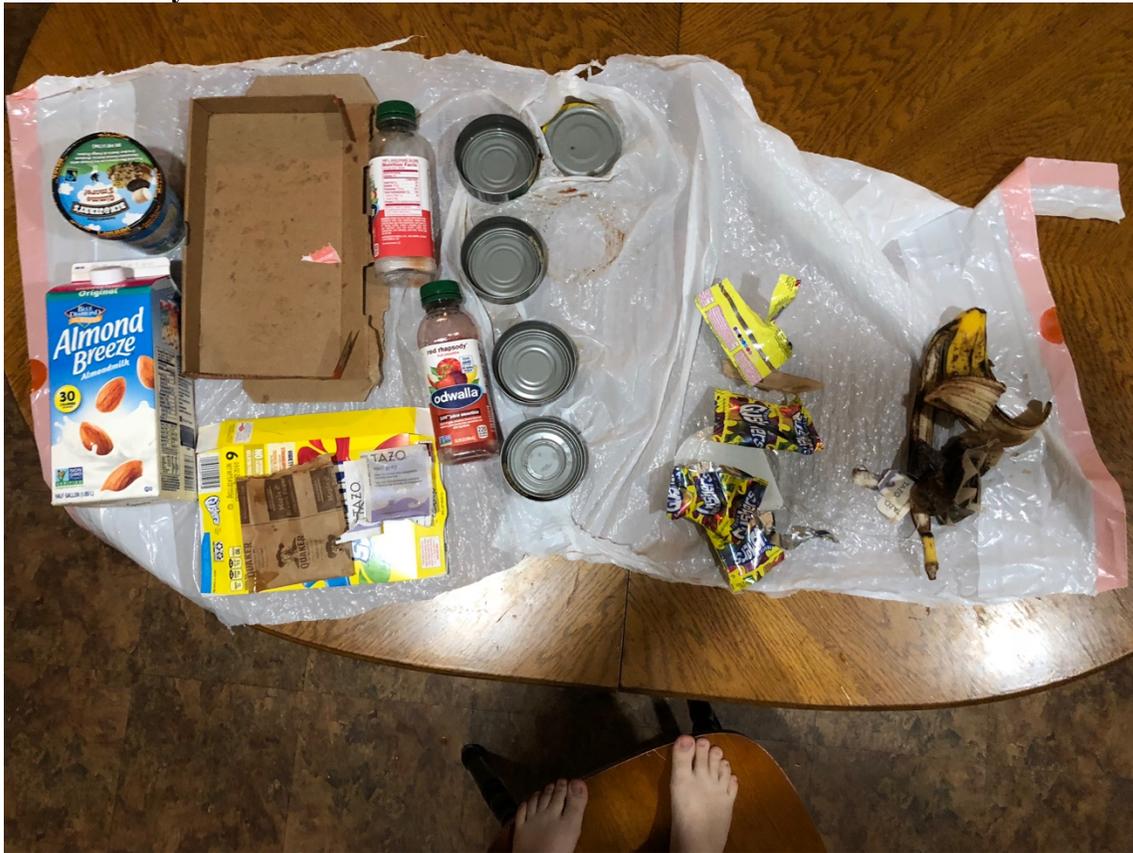
Isabel Minshall

It was actually difficult not to throw anything away for a week. I thought it would be easy and that I didn't typically throw a ton away, which I really don't (at least I don't think I do compared to others), but it is the food scraps that started to add up. It is nice that the banana peels and stuff are biodegradable, but the plastics that I kept them in and even the hummus containers are not good for the environment. In addition, I usually use makeup wipes to take off my makeup at night, but doing this made me want to stop using those and start washing my face instead so that I wasn't throwing away the wipes. There were certain things I just couldn't keep with me for a week, like my salmon skin and things that would smell so bad if I kept them.

What I learned is that while I didn't have a TON that I had to keep with me all week, I realize that other people probably have a lot more. I am conscientious about my waste and try to be good about all of that, but even my friends and my roommates are not. It was frustrating seeing how much they throw away... I got upset when I had to throw away some of my bread because of mold, but then I would see my roommates throwing away so much more! I think more people should have to do this to see the impact they are making on the environment. This has made me want to get reusable ziplock bags. I already use tupperware, but I want to limit the amount of plastic I use even more. I enjoyed this experience, even though it was difficult.



Madeline McKay



My experience overall was pretty eye opening. While I try to create as little trash as possible I did find myself creating new ways so that I would have less trash at the end of this week. I must mention though that I did forget a couple banana peels and tea bags. The biggest category of trash I made was in recycling. In our house we have a recycling bin that we take out to a different bin than the trash. The other compostable items and the actual trash go into the trash can, I know that having a compost bin would be better but I can't quite convince my roommates.

I learned a lot about what else I could do to cut down on the amount of trash I create and I also have a few more ideas now. I didn't realize how many tea bags I used and just put in the trash. I can use mason jars to get loose leaf tea from the store downtown! Other ideas I have is to make my own fruit smoothies instead of buying and drinking so many odwallas each week. I think this intervention was very helpful for me to realize more ways to improve my trash production.

Sabina Leonard

This self intervention was extremely interesting to take part in. When it was assigned, my initial thought was that my roommates were going to kill me, especially because they are relatively clean and not necessarily environmentally conscious. I did not think they would appreciate the purpose of this intervention and think that it was gross. On the other hand, I was very curious to see how much trash I generated within a week. I found myself actively using less single use materials because I didn't like how large my pile of trash was getting and I also didn't like carrying around trash when I was on campus all day. I considered myself to be relatively thoughtful when it comes to my waste; I use reusable water bottles, pack my lunches and snacks in reusable bags and Tupperware, use reusable grocery bags and try to buy things that are not individually wrapped. The main thing I learned this week is that I am always inclined to grab a paper towel whether it be my "plate" for breakfast, to wipe up a spill, or to wipe my hands. Many times this week I went to grab a paper towel, realized I didn't actually really need it and then wouldn't use it. While I don't think this week is actually representative of the amount of trash I generate within a week, as I was somewhat forgetful and also altered my habits, I think this self intervention was extremely helpful for increasing my mindfulness in regards to the amount of trash I generate that I didn't really need to use in the first place. After this intervention, I hope that I continue being aware of my personal trash generation and can hopefully encourage my roommates and family to be mindful of theirs as well.

