

Recycling

Music

Hi, I'm Dunk and I'm the National Security Agency's Recycling Mascot. I'm here to share a bit about NSA's efforts to be more environmentally friendly, or what I like to call "green."

The Federal Government is the largest purchaser of goods and services in the country. Every product that we use and then discard has the potential to become part of the waste stream and end up in landfills. For this reason, federally mandated pollution prevention laws require government employees to participate in recycling programs to the maximum extent possible.

NSA has been "going green" for over 25 years, implementing countless initiatives to be environmentally friendly.

There are a number of federal laws that require government agencies to recycle and adopt various environmental measures. One such requirement states that at least 50% of all our trash must be recycled or diverted away from a traditional landfill.

Now, you may be asking yourself, why do we need to keep stuff out of landfills. Have you ever SEEN a landfill? They are huge mountains of icky, gooey trash that take up lots of space, they STINK, and can cause many environmental problems. Not to mention that landfills in states like Maryland are getting so filled up with guck that soon we won't have anywhere to put our trash!

To keep as much material out of local landfills as possible, NSA has operated recycling programs for decades. What type of trash is recycled? Almost everything including bottles and cans, books, newspapers, batteries, juice boxes, cardboard, scrap metals, glass, and plastic, so I'm not talking about just recycling a soda can. When others agencies shredded or incinerated their paper, NSA turned ours into pulp and sold it to recyclers who use it to make cardboard pizza boxes. How cool is that? Recycling trash, buying recycled products, and diverting items away from landfills has become a primary goal for NSA employees.

Here's a pretty neat example. In September 2008 NSA started recycling ceiling tiles and processed more than 400,000 of them in just 14 months. In 2010, we were recognized by Armstrong World Industries for being the nation's leader in recycling ceiling tiles. This process not only diverts this material from landfills, it also saves the government a lot of money because landfills charge for each truck that dumps a load of tiles or any material for that matter. In 2009, NSA was formally recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency for its accomplishments in the area of recycling by winning an Environmental Excellence Award.

You know, I gotta say, it's shocking to me how much is thrown away around the world, yet it doesn't need to be. Are you curious what materials NSA recycles? Well here's a look: (show chart)

Keep in mind that businesses and households could recycle these items as well.

And here's something we're really proud of, from 2009 - 2012, NSA consistently diverted 65-75% of ALL of our waste away from landfills and recycled it instead. That's pretty amazing, don't you think? Now let me ask you this, do you recycle? When you drink a can of soda, do you just throw the empty can away or do you put it in a receptacle like me?

How much trash do you think NSA actually recycles? Any idea? Well each year we recycle approximately 13-14 million pounds of material, yeah, that's what I said, 13-14 MILLION.

Just like federal government office buildings, schools generate a significant amount of trash. Looking at the amount and type of trash helps identify opportunities for reduction, reuse, and recycling. These efforts decrease the amount of trash tossed into landfills.

So this is where you come in!

To help school children in Maryland learn how their activities impact the environment, NSA developed a STEM Program Challenge Project which asks students to develop strategies for reducing the environmental burdens associated with waste disposal.

When you see firsthand the trash that is generated in your school, we hope you'll become more interested in reducing waste both at school and at home.

After all, you're the future generation of this planet, so we need to keep it green for you and for all future generations.

This project will allow you to perform an activity that is useful and necessary in the "Real World". So that's why we're challenging you to conduct a waste audit at your school.

So you're asking me, hey Dunk, what is a waste audit? Well, you're going to dig through all of the trash in your school and then you're going to analyze it. You'll need to identify the types of trash making up the waste stream of your school and the amounts of each type of trash, by weight and volume.

Then you'll use math!

Calculate how much of your school's waste you can send to a recycling center instead of it going into a landfill. This will be your waste stream diversion rate.

Then calculate and compare the cost to remove waste from your school when sending it to a landfill versus sending it to a recycling center.

Next, calculate the amount of money that would be generated from recycling that could go back to your school and be spent on supplies, new equipment or activities.

Identify opportunities for increased recycling and waste diversion. Consider waste reduction at its source. What do I mean by that?...well, if you don't use it in the first place, then it can't become waste. Maybe instead of bringing your lunch in paper bags and plastic wrappings,

instead you could bring re-usable lunch bags, for example? Or maybe instead of plastic water bottles you throw away, you use re-usable water bottles.

And what about creative ways to re-use items that normally would go to a landfill or recycling center?

So your challenge is to conduct a waste audit. Be consistent throughout the project. Decide how you'll measure the waste, by weight or volume? What categories will you investigate?...paper, cardboard, plastic bottles, aluminum cans, it's up to you to figure all that out.

So good luck and make me happy, the more you fill me up, the happier I am!