



## ZERO WASTE

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### Defining Zero Waste

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Zero Waste is a concept aimed at eliminating all waste. Zero Waste requires us to think of waste as a potential resource with inherent value rather than as a “problem”. There are many components to Zero Waste which, at its core, include rethinking the lifecycle of a product from development and production through retirement or disposal. Laws such as New York State’s Electronic Equipment Reuse and Recycling Act are forcing manufacturers and retailers to be responsible for the waste generated from the covered electronics they sell. The financial impact of providing recycling options for these products will eventually force manufacturers to reduce the amount of waste generated in their products. When this happens, we will get closer to Zero Waste.

The average person in Westchester County creates 4.6 pounds of trash *every day*. Currently, it takes an area the size of Pennsylvania to dump all the waste Americans generate each year. Landfills and incinerators are a major source of greenhouse gases. If everyone would separate recyclables from waste and practice composting, we could decrease the amount of waste going to landfills by 80%.

The ultimate goal of Zero Waste is a world where nothing goes into landfills or incinerators. Westchester County recently set a goal to reduce the amount of waste generated to 0.6 pounds per person per day by 2030. While 2030 may seem far away, there are many steps individuals, communities and businesses can take today to move towards that goal.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE TODAY AND WHAT YOU CAN DO.

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On the manufacturing level, the goal is to have manufacturers make all or most of their products fully recyclable so that the materials can be recaptured and repurposed. Several large companies are committed to the Zero Waste philosophy and have adopted Zero Waste programs in their plants. GM, Kraft and Subaru are some examples. In 2004, Subaru created the first Zero Waste plant. On the retail level, the goal is to have stores responsible for the waste they generate. Some large food chains have adopted the Zero Waste philosophy. Supervalu food stores (Albertson’s is one of their brands) is committed to sending all edible food that has reached its “sell by” date to local food banks.

On the community level, several communities, and even large cities, like San Francisco, have adopted Zero Waste as a goal and have developed a plan to achieve Zero Waste. For example, in San Francisco, food establishments are prohibited from using polystyrene foam (Styrofoam) in to-go containers, and all to-go containers must be recyclable or compostable.

In North Castle, the Recycling Committee sponsors an annual “Zero Waste Day”, in the spring, where residents can drop off electronic waste, scrap metal, household furniture, dog and cat supplies and seasonal clothing and other items for recycling and reuse.



On the individual level, we can support green companies, green products and green businesses. The first step is to REDUCE waste by selecting products that will end up producing the least amount of waste. The next best option is to REUSE products by donating or repurposing them if possible. The final step would be to RECYCLE or compost items that cannot be reused or donated. The least desirable method is disposal in a landfill.

Below are a few simple steps that can be taken to move towards a goal of Zero Waste.

- think about what you are about to buy (precycle)
- reduce paper and junk mail
- buy in bulk and consider the amount of packaging
- do not purchase single use items
- buy remanufactured equipment
- lease, rent or share equipment
- use cloth napkins, sponges and dish towels
- use reusable shopping bags
- drink filtered water in a reusable container rather than bottled water
- buy green products such as bamboo flooring, recycled paper, etc.
- use an e-readers for newspapers, magazines and books
- compost at home
- recycle all paper, cardboard, glass, aluminum, plastic, metal products and electronics