



The ULS Report™

Helping people Use Less Stuff™ by conserving resources and reducing waste.

Going Green at School Starts at Home

By Robert Lilienfeld, Editor

Back to school time! What if we told you that if you spend an extra 2 minutes to put together school lunches for 2 kids, you can cut waste while saving over \$2 a day, or about \$325 a year? The way to do it is by switching to reusable containers and buying foods in bulk, rather than in single servings.

First, start with a reusable lunch container, rather than disposable sacks. And don't forget that school lunches are a great way to reuse plastic and paper shopping bags.

Almost every lunch has a sandwich. Save on foil and wrap by switching to a reusable container. There's no waste and you'll save money by purchasing fewer disposables.

How about side dishes and desserts? Instead of single serving bags, boxes, and bowls, buy the larger size and fill up reusable containers. Remember the

\$2 per day savings for 2 kids? It all comes from switching to larger sizes and reusable packaging for drinks, fruits, vegetables, chips, cookies and crackers.

OK, we admit to using juice boxes. But we get extended



use from them: We keep them in the freezer and drop them in the lunch box in the morning. They stay cold and keep everything else fresh, so it all gets eaten rather than thrown away. And keeping food out of the trash is the biggest environmental savings of all!

Other Tips:

Because kids tend to be eco-conscious, school supply manufacturers listen. We found many made from recycled materials: Lots of notebooks, tablets, and loose leaf paper are made from recycled paper. Markers, calculators, rulers,

pens, scissors and staplers are made from recycled plastic.

Need batteries? Use rechargeables. The latest "cool" products are AA rechargers that plug into computer USB ports, for charging on the go. Your kids have no excuse that their math homework didn't get done because the calculator died.

Single Serve vs. Bulk Packaging Price Comparison, Kid's Lunch

	Single Serve Packaging		Bulk Packaging		Difference
	Size	Cost/Serving	Size	Cost/Serving	
Fruit Juice	8/6.75 oz. (54 oz.) \$3.29	\$0.41	46 oz. \$2.29	\$0.34	\$0.07
Baby Carrots	3/3 oz. (9 oz.) \$1.69	\$0.56	32 oz. \$3.39	\$0.32	\$0.25
Apple Sauce	6/4 oz. (24 oz.) \$1.79	\$0.30	25 oz. \$1.29	\$0.21	\$0.09
Animal Crackers	1/2.125 oz. \$1.33	\$1.33	8 oz. \$2.39	\$0.64	\$0.69
Per Day					\$1.11
Per School Yr (150 in-school lunches)					\$166.09
2 Kids/Year					\$332.19

One final note: There's no reason that kids can't share items used mainly at home: markers, scissors, brushes, staplers, etc. You'll save money while saving resources.



Focus on Packaging: It Ain't Easy Being Green

Coca Cola and Procter & Gamble have announced that they'll be putting soda and shampoo into bottles made from plant-based plastics. Many other companies have announced that their new packaging is biodegradable or compostable.

If we're looking to create truly sustainable packages, are these claims really as exciting as the marketers and packaging media make them out to be?

Let's start with plant-based plastics, or biopolymers. In general, they're made from sugar or corn. This means that crops which could be used for food are diverted to packaging. If the business grows, it could also mean increased deforestation or land clearing to grow more crops to cover demand for increased packaging. Plus, the science isn't always so positive about the impacts of these materials. Many times, it takes more resources and creates more waste than plastic packaging materials created from natural gas or petroleum.

What about biodegradable materials? In most cases, they are only biodegradable in controlled conditions. Degradation occurs when bacteria digest and break down the compounds into their basic component parts. To exist, these bacteria require heat, water and air. These are three of the key elements that modern landfills are designed to minimize, thus significantly reducing or eliminating the ability for biodegradation to occur!

Plus, when landfills are capped, the objective is to maintain structural integrity so that they can be used for other purposes. Degradation would create landfills that settle over time, reducing the ability to put them to better use.

Compostability is similar to biodegradation. Most compostable materials do not break down in home composting bins or piles, but instead must be transported to industrial composting facilities. We estimate that there are fewer than 20 of these facilities in the entire country. Also, one

of the primary compounds produced by composting is carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas. Oddly then, it may not make sense to place increased emphasis on composting as a waste reduction tool! Once again, we're seeing so-called improvements that may not produce true sustainability.



As you can see, the law of unintended consequences occurs with many of these new technologies. For every potential positive, there is also a potential negative. What's needed is a sense of balance, along with a clear understanding of the various sustainability impacts produced by both the original and newer materials.

Generally, when we apply all of the available science and add a good dose of common sense, we're back to a very basic conclusion: *The best packaging is usually less packaging, regardless of where it comes from or how it's made.* Any package that delivers the product it contains with 100% of the product's intended value, and does so with the least amount of materials, energy, and waste, is most likely the winner.

It's usually that simple.

The ULS Report



4853 Goodison Place Drive
Rochester, MI 48306
248-726-9729
www.use-less-stuff.com
info@use-less-stuff.com

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Robert M. Lilienfeld
TECHNICAL ADVISOR EMERITUS: Dr. William Rathje

We welcome your comments and story ideas.
Contact Bob Lilienfeld: bob@use-less-stuff.com.
Post on our blog: www.uls-report.blogspot.com.
Follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/UseLessStuff.

© 2010 Robert Lilienfeld and LARC Associates, LLC. All rights reserved.
Use Less Stuff, The ULS logo, The ULS Report, CalculLess,
and Reduction Roundup are trademarks of LARC Associates.