



The Day We Didn't Throw Away

7:59am My children are still asleep as I climb down to their basement bedroom carrying the tarp. It's the big blue one we use for camping. I'm spreading it out in the boys' room because they have the largest open floor space in the house.

8:00am The tarp makes a loud crackle when I undo the first fold. "Good morning!" I say to the four angry eyeballs that have popped open and found me standing over them. "Are you guys ready to count trash?"

8:00:30am "Mom, nooooo! Do we really have to do this today?" shout the eyeballs.

8:01am "Yep!" I insist, over the rattle of the tarp under my feet. My family has agreed (has no choice but) to help me complete a 12-hour study of our household trash and other discards as part of my job with Teton County Integrated Solid Waste and Recycling.

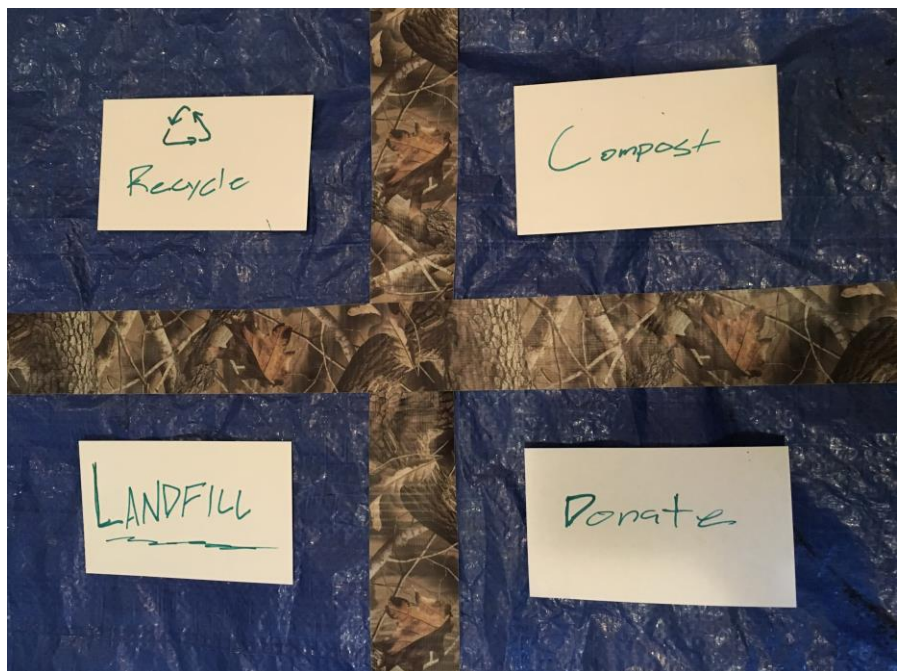
8:01:30am "I know, let's trash this project!" the eyeballs really get rolling.

8:02am Hysterical, we begin. The best way, I explain, to see what we use and throw away every day is to spread it out in one place - instead of tossing it into the different trash cans, recycling bins and donation piles. This will show us what we do now and tell us what we can do better in the future.

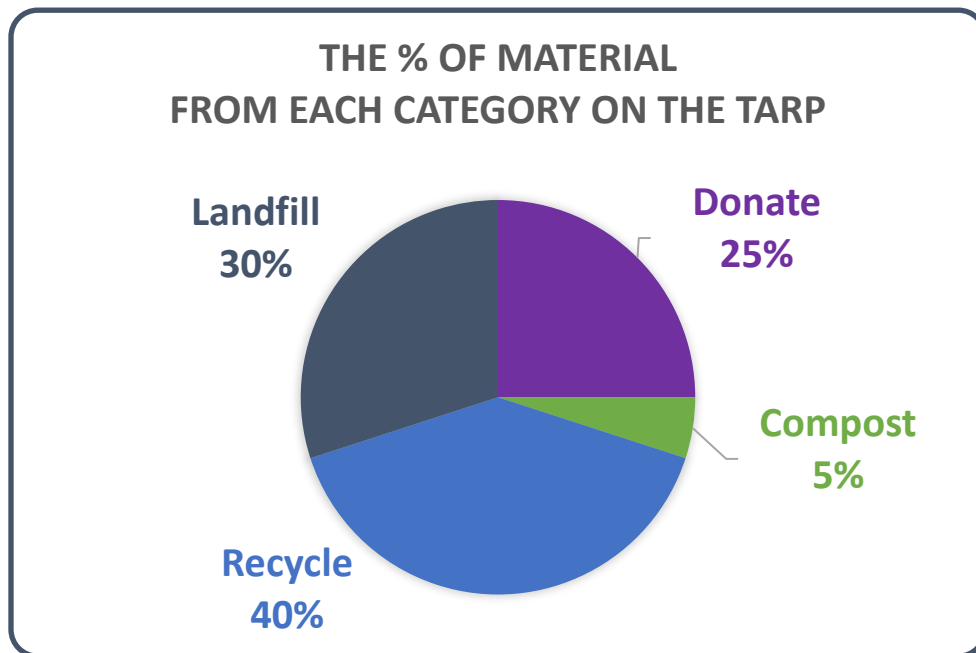
8:03am One of my helpers jumps at the chance to use a Sharpie and create four labels: *landfill*, *recycling*, *composting*, *donations*. We divide the tarp into four equal sections using tape and put a label on each quadrant.

And then we go on with our lives.

9:00am Ironically, the only thing on the tarp is the plastic wrapping from the notecards and duct tape. My office supply addiction might be the low hanging fruit on our journey toward zero waste. But all hope is not lost, [check out these disappearing package ideas](#).



7:59pm Dinner eaten. Dishes washed. We take the last of our discards down to the basement and look out across our ocean of trash. We record these results.



8:01pm We make these observations.

- We did not “win” by getting the highest percentage in the recycling category. Recycling is good, but it’s the last R in **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**. The goal, yes, is to minimize what goes into the landfill but, overall, to have as little as possible on all sections of the tarp.
- Gatorade bottles! I think these things multiply under our beds at night?? If we can’t give up the stuff entirely, let’s at least try mixing it from powder and drinking it from reusable bottles.
- Backyard composting would be terrific, but we live in a condo with no yard. Maybe a friend or neighbor would compost for us in exchange for help with weeding, mowing or other chores.
- Eating at home, cooking from scratch and buying minimally packaged local products would cut down on what we send to the landfill.
- The one thing not on our tarp is paper towels. We have done a pretty good job of incorporating reusable kitchen towels, rags and napkins. [These have been working well for us](#). And the basket pictured here lives under our sink.
- Wouldn’t it be great if we had more room to store cardboard boxes and bubble wrap packaging to use again instead of sending them straight into recycling? [What if Amazon would take them back?](#)
- Our experiment is complete. But it’s just the beginning. What we’ve learned today gives us the opportunity to do more, to use less, to have more days we don’t throw away.

