

Waste-Free Lunch Challenge aims to get ON students reducing waste Special



Toronto - The Waste-Free Lunch Challenge is helping elementary school students in Ontario learn more about waste reduction, while reducing their own waste for a chance to win \$1,000.

The Waste-Free Lunch Challenge (WFLC) is underway, coinciding with the start of Waste Reduction Week Canada, October 17 to 23.

The program is engaging over 200,000 elementary school students in over 800 schools in 63 school boards from across Ontario to learn more about how waste is

generated. And, more importantly, how they can avoid generating unnecessary waste in their lunches every day. Many parents and guardians may not realize that in Ontario, the average elementary school generates over 30 kg (66 lbs) of food annually. And when you multiply that by Ontario's 4000-plus schools, this is a lot of generated waste that can easily be avoided.

And WFLC, a program of the Recycling Council of Ontario (RCO), aims to teach those students how. "Successful lunches will have resealable and refillable containers," the RCO writes, "no disposable packaging and will be packed in a lunchbox." And while this may seem a tall order for busy parents simply hoping to get their child to school on time with a lunch, wasteful habits were learned, and can, with time, be unlearned. To make the choices parents should make easier, a successful waste-free lunch program will start with teaching children not only what is considered wasteful, but why it is harmful, and how the impact can be lessened.

The program asks students and teachers to reduce the volume of waste they generate in their lunches for the week. Led by their teacher, the class will conduct a small waste audits at the end of each day and tally the volume of waste generated over five days. There are cash prizes for the classrooms that reduce the most waste.

Jo-Anne St. Godard, Executive Director of the Recycling Council of Ontario, [writes that](#):

"This challenge is an exciting and fun way to engage students, educators and parents to learn about waste reduction and recycling. We've quadrupled our participation rate this year with 200,000 plus students. Clearly they understand the importance of waste reduction and are more than willing to take up our challenge."

St. Godard adds that "we anticipate that the challenge will prevent hundreds of tonnes of waste from entering Ontario landfills".

The program has found supportive sponsors in Metro Inc., the grocery giant who funded the program in 2010, and Tetra Pak. Both sponsors have worked together before on the Play Soccer initiative, an Ontario-based community program that encouraged players, parents, and coaches to properly dispose of and lessen waste at soccer facilities across the province.

Tetra Pak especially has been keen to show parents and environmentalists alike that they are conscious of the environmental effects of their carton packaging, and are taking strides to improve how they process their waste.

To that end, Tetra Pak has been "actively supporting advancements in recycling technology," largely by "helping sorting facilities upgrade and/or quickly adopt the equipment changes needed to successfully incorporate cartons into recycling systems."

In a [press release](#) on their involvement with the Waste Free Lunch Challenge, Tetra Pak notes their recent partnership with "Quebec-based recycling company, Groupe RCM, to invest in a new recycling line that converts cartons, plastic bags and films into useful post-consumer products such as flower pots, railway ties and plastic lumber."

So far, the program was renewed for the 2011 season, with hopes of ongoing renewal. But Catherine Leighton, the program manager for the Waste Free Lunch Challenge, is ecstatic that the number of students participating jumped from 50,000 in 2010 to over 200,000 in 2011. This three-fold increase in student participation should help the program secure funding into the future.

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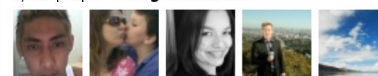
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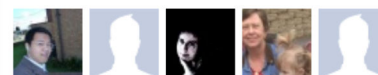
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