

Project Ideas



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Some areas of your school may be off-limits without permission from your teacher or principal, and some projects should be done with at least one partner. Check with your teacher before beginning any activities or projects related to this fact sheet.

Diesel School Buses

Make a bus map: Observe the area where buses drop off or pick up kids. Is it close to any buildings? Could bus exhaust get inside the buildings? If so, draw a map of the loading area and any nearby buildings, showing windows, doors and air vents that could let in exhaust. Give the map to your principal and ask for a new waiting area for buses.

Time how long buses run outside your school: Use a timer to measure how long the engines stay on when buses are parked outside your school. Take your results to the principal, who can tell you if the buses are following the rules. (Many states and cities have laws about this.)

Chart clean fuels: Research cleaner school bus fuels. Try looking up "propane," "LP gas," "compressed natural gas" or "CNG." Find out where the fuels come from and how much pollution they cause, then make a chart comparing cleaner fuels with diesel. A good place to start is the EPA fact sheet "Alternative Fuels", available online at <http://www.epa.gov/otaq/consumer/fuels/altfuels/altfuels.htm>.

Campaign for cleaner buses: Talk to your principal to find out who is in charge of making decisions about new school bus purchases. Then ask the person or people responsible (it may be the head of transportation for your district, or it may be the school board) to switch to

cleaner buses. You can write a letter or start a petition. See http://www.nrdc.org/greensquad/library/diesel_letter.txt for a sample letter: You can find the names and addresses of school district staff and the members of your school board at your school office.

Indoor Air Quality in Schools

Mold monitoring: Inspect your school for signs of mold. Pick a room (or several) and examine all the surfaces for mold, which is often slimy or fuzzy, and is usually green, black, orange or purple. (But if you find it, don't touch it!) Also check for signs of leaks or dampness. Use your nose to help you: Pay attention to any musty or earthy smells. Keep a list, then report your findings to your principal. Make a map showing any places you found mold or leaks, or noticed odd smells.

Vent search: Take some time to locate all the indoor vents in your classroom. Some may be built into walls or ceilings, others may be parts of heaters or air conditioners. Make sure air is able to flow freely through them all. If anything is blocking a vent, move it. Look for the intake vents outside the school building (the one that draw in air from the outside) too, and check whether they're near pollution sources, such as exhaust fans or trucks and buses. If they are, report this to your principal. Safety note: Keep your hands out of the vents and equipment. And get permission and help from the custodian before investigating any equipment closets.

Inside view: If your classroom has an air conditioner or any other ventilating equipment, ask your custodian to show you the inside. If it's dirty, rusty or dusty, it needs to be cleaned.

Painting Schools

Research the rules on paint disposal: Because leftover paint is such a big environmental problem, many areas have strict rules on how to dispose of it. Find out what the rules are where you live. Your local sanitation department is a good place to start.

Pesticides and Schools

Gardening group: If your school has shrubs or bushes outdoors, why not start a club to make them beautiful and chemical-free? It's a great way to spend time outdoors, learn about plants and put your environmentalism into action. Planting bushes and shrubs away from the building keeps pests at a distance, too.

Research native plants: Plants that grow naturally in your region are less likely to need pesticides to stay healthy because they've adapted to the area's climate and soil conditions. Find out which plants are native to your region. Which are the most common? Which have special characteristics? Have any of them disappeared? A gardening guide can get you started. To find one, try an Internet search with terms like "gardening," "native plants" and "guide," plus the name of your state or region.

Anti-pest patrols: Take a tour of your school, looking for places that might attract rodents or bugs. Is trash piling up in a room or an empty locker? Do cracks or other openings need to be sealed? Make a list of problem areas and report them to your custodian or principal. Make a map and show how you and your school can keep pests out of your school.

Clean Out Your Desk or Locker Day: Do the desks in your classroom have drawers? If they do, set aside a day to clean them out. Get rid of garbage and crumbs. Who knows — you might find that notebook you've been looking for! Locker cleanup day is a good idea, too.

Food-Free Zones: Your school should designate areas where food is prohibited. If your school doesn't already have food-free zones, look around and suggest areas where food should and shouldn't be allowed. If your school is going to keep pests out of the classrooms without using chemical pesticides, then food has to stay out of the classrooms, too.

Renovating Schools

Renovation reminders: Make posters to remind everyone at school about the steps needed to keep renovations safe.

Saving Paper In Schools

Paper proposals: Take some time to observe how paper is used in your school. You'll probably discover examples of waste. Make a list of five to 10 ways your school can use paper more efficiently, then present it to your principal.

Scrap pile: Choose a spot in your class for collecting paper that can be reused. Some of it might make good scribble paper. Or you could collect some bigger sheets and staple them together, perhaps on a cardboard backing, to make assignment pads. Colored paper is good for art projects — try cutting it up to use for "mosaics."

Make your own recycled paper: Making your own paper is a fun project. And you'll be doing your own recycling! There are lots of books and websites to help you. Try this guide from the Exploratorium <http://www.exploratorium.edu/exploring/paper/handmade.html>

Paper review: Find out what kind of paper your school buys for its offices and classrooms. Check the packaging to see if it's recycled (it should have at least 30 percent post-consumer waste). Also, see if it has a PCF label to show it was made without chlorine bleaching. If your school uses paper whitened with chlorine bleach, talk to your principal.

Schools and Waste

Learn the rules on recycling: What materials are recycled in your community? How should they be sorted? To find out, check with your local sanitation department. Or visit Earth's 911 (<http://www.1800cleanup.org/>), where you can enter your zip code to receive information on local recycling efforts. Then find out how your school participates in community recycling. A custodian is a good person to ask.

Compost committee: Form a group — maybe an entire class — to be in charge of composting. Composting is easy, since nature does most of the work. But you need to follow some important rules to prevent odors and keep bugs and rodents away. You can get advice from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's compost fact sheet <http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/wm/recycle/FACTS/COMPOST.HTM>) and Florida's Online composting tutorial (<http://www.compostinfo.com/Default.htm>). There are also a lot of books on composting.