

Activity 6: Analyzing Product Packages

Objective: Analyze several products to determine if their packaging wastes resources; suggest packaging options that waste fewer materials.

Materials:

several store-bought products in their original packaging
copies of the activity data sheet

large poster paper
markers and rulers

Background:

Much of the trash we throw away is just the packaging that the products we use came in. Packaging is sometimes very useful; it protects products from damage during shipping and makes products easier to store or handle. Many products, however, are over-packaged. Some products come in packages that are much too large or are made from materials that are very difficult to re-use or dispose of in an environmentally friendly way. For example, tiny cellular phones are often packaged in plastic, surround by lots of foam cushioning, and placed in boxes much larger than the size of a phone. In fact, the instruction manuals for some cell phones are heavier than the phones themselves! Sometimes over-packaging is done to protect products but other times it is done because manufacturers know that large, attention-getting packages can catch the eye of shoppers and increase sales. Products in larger or more attractive packages tend to sell much faster than similar products in smaller or less attractive packages.

One of the best ways that consumers can conserve resources is to make a conscious effort to buy products that are not over-packaged. Careful shopping on our part can reduce the amount of solid waste from packaging that we send to the landfill. A small reduction in solid waste, if accomplished by large numbers of people, can drastically reduce the amount of package-related materials that our society sends to landfills each year.

Directions:

1. Place a large assortment of products in their original store packaging on a table and spread them out so that they are easily visible by everyone. Have participants work in groups of two, three, or four. They should choose several packaged items and analyze each one to determine if it is over-packaged. The activity sheet provides space for recording information.
2. Have participants discuss the analysis and conclusion questions at the end of the activity sheet. Bring everyone together as a group and discuss their findings and thoughts/ideas.
3. Challenge each group to choose two or more products and re-design their packages so that they are still functional but they use fewer resources. They can draw their newly designed packages on large sheets of paper and label changes that have been made to reduce packaging waste.

4. Have all participants share their ideas with the large group and lead a discussion about how these and other products can be re-designed so as to attract buyers in a store while simultaneously conserving resources.
5. **Extension Activity:** Have each person select a product package re-design that he or she thinks would function and sell well in a store. Each person should create a 3-dimensional version of his or her new package. The new packages can then be shared with the group or used at club promotional events. Youth with entrepreneur spirit could also share their package re-designs with the companies who package each product in an attempt to make the companies aware of the need for reduction of packaging waste.

Analyzing Product Packages



Name _____




Objective: Analyze several products to determine if their packaging wastes resources; suggest packaging options that waste fewer materials.

Materials:

A large assortment of store-bought products in their original packaging poster paper markers and rulers

Directions:

Choose several packaged items and determine if they are over-packaged and waste resources. Use the chart below to guide you.

PRODUCT NAME 	TYPES OF PACKAGING MATERIALS (plastic, foam, paper, metal, glass, etc.)	SIZE OF PACKAGE COMPARED TO PRODUCT (close in size, larger, much larger)	WEIGHT OF PACKAGE COMPARED TO PRODUCT (lighter, same weight, heavier)	DOES PRODUCT APPEAR TO BE OVER-PACKAGED? WHY OR WHY NOT? 	HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE THE PACKAGING TO REDUCE WASTE? 



Analysis and Conclusion:

1. Are there certain types of products that tend to be over-packaged? For example, do food items, clothing, electronics, etc. as a group tend to have more packaging than they need? Explain.
2. Manufacturers want to save money, not waste it. Why do you think some of the items you analyzed are over-packaged? In other words, why would the company use more packaging than necessary? What's in it for them?
3. Which product, out of all the ones you studied, is the MOST over-packaged in your opinion? Why?
4. Which product package wasted the LEAST amount of resources? Why?
5. Choose any two or three over-packaged products that you examined today or that you might buy at the store. Using large poster paper and markers, re-design the packaging for these products to make it less wasteful of natural resources. Draw your designs on the large poster paper and label the changes you have made to the packages. Keep in mind that the packages still need to do their job in protecting the products they contain!

Extension Activity: Build new, re-designed 3-dimensional packages for one or more products that protect the products but reduce the amount of packaging waste. Share your new packages with your group or club! Get your creative juices going!

