

# Starting a Green Patrol

A Green Patrol is a valuable tool for involving students and staff in your school's recycling and sustainability efforts. A Green Patrol can help shift a school's culture and attitude related to resource conservation. Schools implementing Green Patrols report more ownership of and involvement in recycling from students and staff, as well as lower levels of contamination (trash in the recycling and recycling in the trash).

A Green Patrol involves a selected group of students auditing the recycling and trash bins in classrooms and other locations throughout the school. During the audit, Green Patrol members score the room (using a 1-3 or 1-5 scale) based on the level of contamination found in the recycling and trash bins. The audit scores are recorded and posted on laminated signs outside of each classroom and are also recorded on the Green Patrol data tracking sheets. The data tracking sheets allow the Green Patrol to keep track of the classroom scores over time.

## **Forming the Green Patrol**

Six to eight students is an ideal number of Green Patrol team members. The Green Patrol is most successful with fourth and fifth grade students. However, the Green Patrol can incorporate mentoring, when an older student is paired with a younger student. Consider interviewing students for the Green Patrol. The interview process assists in setting expectations and frames the Green Patrol as a privilege for students.

## **The auditing process**

The auditing process will provide your school with measurable evidence that you are meeting your recycling or waste reduction goals. The Green Patrol audit can take place any time there is likely to be material in the recycling and trash bins and can be done weekly, biweekly or monthly. Consider auditing during the lunch recess. Students will not miss out on instructional time and may be excited about doing something different.

Working in pairs, Green Patrol members will be responsible for a section of the school. During the audit the Green Patrol student pairs quietly enter a classroom to inspect the recycling and trash bins. If students are present in the classroom the bins can be taken to the hallway for inspection. The inspection is visual. The Green Patrol auditors can gently shake the recycling and trash bins to see what's at the bottom. After the visual inspection the Green Patrol auditors come to a consensus on the score. The score is recorded on the tracking sheet and the classroom sign and the bins are returned to the classroom. A teacher or student may ask why their class received the score. An important part of the Green Patrol training is to help student auditors understand and articulate how scores are given and how a better score can be achieved.

## **Incentives and awards**

The Green Patrol can sustain interest in recycling over time by fostering healthy competition between classrooms. As an incentive the Green Patrol can present an award or trophy to high performing classrooms at school assemblies. The award can be something that is reused such as a dressed up old trophy and can be passed between classrooms.

## **Publicizing**

Keeping students and staff up-to-date on Green Patrol efforts helps create new social norms about resource conservation and recycling at your school. Create updates, reminders or fun facts to be read during all school announcements. Write an article for the school newsletter and post information on school bulletin boards.

## **Sustaining the Green Patrol**

To sustain the Green Patrol momentum, start recruiting and training new students toward the end of each school year. After interviewing new Green Patrol students, pair them with veteran members for on-the-job training.

## How to start the Green Patrol

### Before for the Green Patrol training:

- Get the approval of the principal, and if appropriate, the support of the staff at the school.
- Check-in with the custodial staff to let them know what's going to happen, try to get a custodian involved.
- Send e-mail to school staff explaining the Green Patrol idea. Include what they can expect with the Green Patrol audits.
- Interview and select the Green Patrol members.
- Prepare supplies.
- Divide the school into the appropriate number of sections.
- Make the data tracking sheets for the students. Or record score copies of the school map (with audit sections marked) let the students write the room number or teacher's name on the data tracking sheets during the first training.
- Plan to conduct the first training when there is material in trash and recycling bins.

### During the first Green Patrol training (can be 2 sessions if needed)

- Review how the Green Patrol will work, and what they'll be doing.
- With students, identify what can and cannot be included in your schools recycling bins. It be may be helpful to have the custodian present this information to the Green Patrol.
- As a group, decide what each level of scoring looks like.
- Take the entire Green Patrol and go to several non-classroom areas (enough areas that each audit pair will be able to audit a receptacle in front of the entire group). With students taking the lead, audit the recycling and trash bins, discuss the how students scored the bins and record the scores.
- If time permits, allow each pair to audit the classrooms in their section.
- Debrief with the students about their audit experience and any challenges. Ask questions like:
  - How did it go?
  - What were your lowest score(s)? What could these rooms have done better?
  - What were your higher scores? Review the scoring.
  - Did you get any questions about recycling? What did you say?
  - Did you have any problems/challenges? If so, what? What can we do to solve these challenges?

### During subsequent Green Patrol audits

- Review the supplies.
- Review what each level of scoring looks like.
- Review the auditing process, visual inspection and recording scores on classroom signs and datasheet.
- Remind students of expectations
- Send student pairs to the classrooms in their section
- Ask them to come back to the designated spot for the debrief
- While the students are auditing, float between the groups to check-in with them and remind them of scoring, expectations, etc.
- When they're finished, hold a debrief where you ask questions similar to those in the first training debrief

### Supplies

- Appropriate markers to write on lamination and a piece of cloth or erasing previous scores
- Classroom signs laminated and posted at each audit location
- Safety vests, sashes or some other identifier (denotes students are part of the Green Patrol to other school staff)
- Clipboard for each pair of students
- Data tracking sheets (or a map of the school) and pencils