Classroom activity to identify over-packaged items

Purpose

Students will be able to examine product packaging to determine whether packaging is excessive and whether it is recyclable. They will learn how to reduce the amount of disposable packaging in their lunches.

Overview

In this activity students will:

1. Discuss the purpose of packaging
2. Compare the amount of packaging used for different items
3. Identify the waste created by packaging
4. Determine that some packaging is easier to recycle than others
5. Reduce the amount of disposable packaging used in preparing their lunches

Preparation

1. Ask each student to bring to class a variety of packaging materials such as aluminum cans, bottles, and plastic produce bags. Cans, bottles, jars, etc. must be rinsed clean, and labels left intact. Boxes and packages should be empty OR ask students to bring a specific type of packaging, for example a variety of cookies or candy. (It may be necessary for the instructor to provide extra packaging items).

Activity

1. Have students show the packaging they brought from home. Give students an opportunity to share with the class the packaging they brought.

2. Ask students why things need to be packaged. Show students something they are familiar with, such as a “pre-packaged lunch.” Have students take it apart to look at the packaging.

3. Have students separate the packaging into categories such as reusable, recyclable, compostable and garbage (landfill). Ask students to determine which packaging is easy to reuse or recycle or compost and which packaging is sent to the landfill. Discuss why they think the manufacturer chose each type of packaging.

4. Have students discuss the purposes of the packaging; e.g., maintaining safety, marketing, protecting the product. List ideas on a whiteboard or chalkboard.

5. Discuss at least 5 ways students can reduce packing in their lunches.

6. Review the School Guide on Castro Valley Sanitary District’s website at www.cvsan.org to learn what can be reused, recycled or composted.