



Environmental Practice Portfolio

From Observation to Action: Improving Packaging
Waste Handling in Residential Building

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From Observation to Action: Improving Packaging Waste Handling in Residential Building

Designed and carried out a small-scale, community-led intervention to improve carton and packaging waste separation in a shared apartment building through observation, resident engagement, and practical communication.



1. Waste Handling in Shared Apartment Building

1.1. Context

This observation took place in the shared waste disposal area of a multi-unit apartment building. All household waste is typically disposed of in common bins, with no clear separation for cartons or recyclable packaging materials.

1.2. What Exists

Packaging materials such as cartons are frequently disposed of alongside food and general household waste. Cartons are often unflattened, taking up significant space in the bins and contributing to faster overflow.

There is limited signage or guidance near the waste area, and residents dispose of waste independently, relying on habit rather than shared systems.

1.3. Observed Challenges

Mixing cartons with food waste increases contamination and makes recovery or recycling more difficult. Unflattened cartons contribute disproportionately to bin volume, resulting in bins filling up quickly and requiring more frequent collection.

These observations suggested that the issue was not intentional misuse, but rather a lack of awareness and visible guidance.

2. Environmental Action Report: Improving Carton and Packaging Waste Separation

2.1. Description of Action

Over a two-week period, I carried out a small environmental action focused on improving how packaging waste—particularly cartons—was handled in my apartment building. The action involved observing existing waste disposal practices, speaking informally with co-tenants about separating carton and packaging waste from general waste, and encouraging simple changes such as flattening cartons before disposal.

2.2. Motivation

This action was motivated by the understanding that packaging waste, especially cartons, takes up significant space when not flattened or separated. Improving sorting practices at the building level could reduce waste volume, improve waste handling, and potentially lower waste collection costs without requiring major infrastructure changes.

The goal was not to introduce rules or enforcement, but to test whether simple awareness and small behavior shifts could lead to practical improvements.

2.3. Initial Observation During Action

During the two-week period, I observed that many co-tenants were not intentionally mixing packaging waste with other waste, but were simply unaware that cartons could be separated or flattened. This reinforced the importance of communication that was friendly and non-confrontational.

3. Community Impact Report: Shared Action and Participation

3.1. Goal

The goal of this community action was to improve how carton and packaging waste was sorted within my apartment building by encouraging residents to separate cartons from general waste.

Building on my earlier individual observations, this action aimed to test whether **simple conversations and shared awareness**, rather than enforcement, could influence waste disposal habits among co-tenants.

3.2. What happened

The action took place over the same two-week period within the apartment building. I identified times when residents were most likely to be present near the waste area and spoke informally with a small number of co-tenants during casual encounters in shared spaces such as the parking area, stairwell, and near the waste bins.

These conversations were short and respectful. I explained that cartons were recyclable, that mixing them with general waste made recycling difficult, and that separating and flattening them could reduce waste volume.

In addition to conversations, I created a simple handwritten sign and placed it near the waste bins. The sign politely asked residents to separate cartons and packaging from general waste and briefly explained why this mattered. The message emphasized shared benefit and ease rather than instruction or obligation.

3.3. Participants

Participation was informal and voluntary.

- Five co-tenants participated through direct conversation
- One building cleaner shared insight into waste collection challenges
- Other residents participated indirectly by seeing the sign or observing changes in the waste area

No one was required to take part, and no incentives were offered beyond shared understanding and convenience.

3.4. Observed Changes

Several small but noticeable changes were observed during the action period.

Cartons began appearing more frequently separated from general waste, either flattened and grouped together or placed beside bins. While sorting was not consistent across all residents, there was a visible reduction in cartons mixed with food waste.

The general waste bin filled more slowly than usual. The building cleaner confirmed that the bin required less frequent emptying compared to previous weeks. Two co-tenants independently mentioned that they had started flattening cartons after our conversations.

While the action did not lead to full building-wide behavior change, it demonstrated that **small social interventions can influence shared environmental practices.**

4. Reflection and Learning

One challenge was the lack of formal recycling infrastructure. Without a designated carton recycling bin, residents relied on shared understanding rather than clear systems, which limited consistency.

Another challenge was engagement. Some residents were rushed or uninterested, reinforcing the importance of timing, tone, and not forcing participation.

A key learning from this experience was that **environmental change in shared spaces depends more on relationships than rules**. People were more receptive when conversations focused on shared benefit, convenience, and potential cost savings rather than environmental guilt.

This action also demonstrated that partial success still represents real impact. Even small shifts in awareness and behavior can create momentum for longer-term change, particularly in community settings.

5. Green Skill Inventory

Through this environmental practice, I developed and applied the following skills:

Observation & Problem Identification

Observed waste disposal patterns in a shared residential space and identified carton waste as a key contributor to bin overflow.

Community Engagement & Listening

Engaged co-tenants through informal, respectful conversations to understand habits before suggesting changes.

Clear Communication

Explained waste separation practices in simple, accessible language through conversation and signage.

Action Planning & Implementation

Designed and carried out a realistic environmental action within existing constraints and limited resources.

Documentation & Reporting

Recorded actions, participation, observed changes, and reflections through structured written reports.

Ethical Environmental Practice

Focused on voluntary participation and shared benefit rather than enforcement or pressure.

6. Closing Summary

This portfolio reflects applied environmental practice rooted in everyday life. Through observation, individual action, community engagement, and reflection, I developed practical experience in how environmental change occurs within real systems. The work demonstrates an ability to identify problems, design people-centered interventions, and document outcomes honestly and professionally.