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Limiting Excessive Waste with Pricey Bags

The Swiss are very particular about how, and what, they dispose of. There are many rules that must be followed in Switzerland, and if you get caught breaking any of them you should most certainly expect a hefty fine. One specific example of this in Luzern, is trash bags, more specifically, the color you use. When you walk into a grocery store in Luzern, you will come across large, black trash bags, nearly identical to those found in the United States. However, those bags are only meant to be used as a trash can liner. The bags you will need, however, must be asked for behind the checkout counter. By law in Luzern, “normal” trash that is sent to the landfill, called “abfall”, must be placed into a bright blue trash bag and disposed of into the correct receptacle. Black bags are strictly prohibited and if you get caught tossing one of these bags in with the blues, you could be looking at a fine of up to 100 Swiss Francs. It is said that even if you are not immediately caught in the act, authorities will occasionally sift through the black bags in search of any pieces of mail which may lead to who is illegally dumping. I personally have never had this happen to anyone I know who has improperly dumped, but I would not put it passed the Swiss. So, is there a reason to this madness? Absolutely.

The system behind this is that it costs about 2 Franks, a little more than 2 USD, per blue trash bag. These special bags have what is called a green tax, meaning you pay for the amount of trash you produce. Because these everyday trash bags are so pricey, it really makes you more careful about what you choose throw away, compost, or recycle. The good news is that recycling is free and convenient. This gives you further incentive to really take care to sort through your waste and ensure that all the space you are using in that little blue trash bag is used for things that really just cannot be recycled. At our house, we have separate containers to collect newspaper, cardboard, plastic bottles, glass, tins, nespresso capsules, along with a small separate green bin specifically for compostable foods. Once these containers are filled up, we head down the street to one of our local recycling centers, which is open all year, Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. If you are not in the mood for the recycling center, all local grocery stores have easily accessible recycling sections where you can toss those PET bottles, cans, batteries, etc. Newspapers bins are generally provided for you in your apartment building or home, and cardboards must either be bundled up into a small pile and places outside at a specific time of day.

More information about the waste pickup processes for different cantons in Switzerland can be read at this website: <http://www.helloswitzerland.ch/-/waste-recycling-in-lucerne>

My town's Waste Chart: The first and second pages show what is allowed to be thrown into the REAL blue trash bags and how much each different sized bag costs per 10 bags. The information for the alternative methods of waste disposal are also posted here. The following pages have more information on the collection dates, times, and and special procedures. http://www.real-luzern.ch/fileadmin/real_entsorgungsinfo_pdf/2018/Rothenburg_Entsorgungsinfo.pdf



These are some of materials we store for the recycling center. Though all of the glasses are mixed together, they will be separated once we arrive at the recycling center. More can be read about this in my next activity log on the recycling center itself.



On the left is the expensive bag that discourages excess waste production and encourages recycling. On the right is our little green compost bin filled with plants that I have recently killed.