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PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Oneida Herkimer Solid Waste Authority Announces Sixth Annual Zero Waste Lunch Challenge

The Oneida-Herkimer Solid Waste Authority is proud to kick-off its sixth annual Zero Waste Lunch Challenge for all public and private K-12 school buildings in Oneida and Herkimer Counties.

The purpose of the Zero Waste Lunch Challenge is to demonstrate how students can reduce the amount of waste they produce. Lunch time waste is the number two category of waste produced in schools, with paper being number one. One child bringing a disposable lunch to school every day creates an average of 67 pounds of lunch waste per year. "If students can learn to make less waste at lunch, then they can apply it to other aspects of everyday life," said Jamie Tuttle, Authority School Recycling Coordinator. "The Zero Waste Lunch Challenge aims to show students that simply throwing items away after use wastes valuable natural resources and energy, and causes pollution. We invite schools to take the challenge and teach an environmental lesson of reducing, reusing, and recycling," continued Tuttle. Many schools use the Challenge as a way to celebrate Earth Day. In 2015, all of the schools that hosted Zero Waste Lunches reduced their amount of cafeteria waste by over 50%, and some schools by over 75%.

For this event, students will be asked to bring lunches that include as many items as possible that can be eaten, recycled, or composted and as few items as possible that must be thrown away. Following are tips for packing waste-free lunches:

- Instead of using plastic baggies, put sandwiches in reusable containers. If you must use plastic bags, don't throw them away-reuse them again.
- Avoid individually or pre-packaged single-serve items such as chips, string cheese, cookies, and drinks.
- Pack lunches with washable utensils instead of disposable forks and spoons.
- Pack reusable cloth napkins rather than paper napkins.
- Only pack as much food as your child will eat.
- Label all containers with your name so they will have a better chance of coming home.
- Cut large items up so your child can save food for after-school snacking or recess.

Schools will be divided into two categories: Grades K-6 and grades 7-12. One school from each category will win the Grand Prize for the Challenge and evaluation will be based on the lowest percentage of lunchtime waste per capita on the day the school hosts the event. The winning school will be announced on **May 9, 2016**. The Authority will award the winning school building from the grades K-6 category with presentations from the Utica Zoo's "Zoomobile." The winning school from the grades 7-12 category will be awarded a live, remote radio broadcast from the KISS FM DJs at their school. In addition, the winning schools' "Green Teams" will be awarded tours of the Authority's Single Stream Recycling Center. Transportation costs will be paid for by the Authority. Schools that wish to participate in the challenge should register by **March 25, 2016**.

This year, a second place school from each category will also receive an award. The second place schools will receive reusable water bottles for each student in the school building.

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For more information about the Authority's *Go Green School Recycling Program* or to register for the Zero Waste Lunch Challenge, please contact School Recycling Coordinator, Jamie Tuttle at 733-1224 ext. 2300 or via email at jamiet@ohswa.org. Zero Waste Lunch Challenge Rules and Information can be viewed on the Authority's website at www.ohswa.org.

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