



GUIDE TO **WASTE REDUCTION** AT EVENTS



GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

TRASH

PLASTIC
UTENSILS

STRAWS

FOAM
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KINGMAN ISLAND
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WASHINGTON, DC

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DEPARTMENT OF THE
ENVIRONMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
K. JENNIFER BOWEN, DIRECTOR

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VOLUNTEER

FRIENDS OF
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WHY ZERO WASTE?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has estimated roughly 42% of all greenhouse gas emissions come from the production of goods, food products and packaging. Reducing, reusing, and recycling helps conserve the energy it takes to manufacture these items, and it reduces our carbon emissions.

Pollution doesn't just come from how we manufacture products. Landfills and incinerators send toxic chemicals into our air and water, too. In the United States, we make enough trash each day to fill more than 40,000 nine-ton garbage trucks. The EPA has concluded that all landfills will eventually leak heavy metals, organic and inorganic pollutants, and other toxins into the environment.

The Bowser Administration has set a goal for the District of Columbia to divert 80% of waste from landfill or incineration (including waste-to-energy) by 2032. We all have a role to play in meeting that goal. One opportunity that is often overlooked is how we manage waste at events. Reducing the amount of waste generated at an event has positive environmental, social, and financial impacts.

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Minimizing waste at events recovers the value of unwanted or leftover items by diverting valuable resources (recyclable, reusable, and compostable materials) from the landfill.
- Composting food waste and compostable packaging materials keeps them out of the landfill, and reduces dangerous greenhouse gas emissions.

SOCIAL

- Planning a zero or reduced waste event promotes a positive image, and increases the visibility of and participation in events.
- Hosting zero or reduced waste events shows leadership in waste reduction and encourages others to do the same.
- Participating in zero or reduced waste events increases public awareness about general waste reduction.

ECONOMIC

- Consuming less and reusing more can result in money saved.
- Zero waste events can trigger innovation. As demand for sustainable products and services increases, the market for green resources grows.
- Zero and reduced waste events give a boost to local businesses and organizations that offer green products and services, putting more money into local economies.

The idea of a zero waste event may seem like a daunting task, or too hard to pull off. However, if you put a little extra effort into the planning process, you'll find it's not that difficult after all!

This guide is a resource for how to incorporate waste-reducing practices into public and private events. It was compiled by the District of Columbia's Department of Energy and Environment, in partnership with the Department of Public Works.

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SECTION 1

PLANNING FOR WASTE

Reducing waste requires thinking about how disposable items can be eliminated from your event and how the remaining waste can be reclaimed as a resource through reuse, recycling, or composting. Follow these general guidelines to make your planning easy!

SET WASTE REDUCTION GOALS

Planning and executing zero waste events takes practice. Therefore, it is a good idea to develop a plan that includes goals that are challenging but also practical. For example, it might not be realistic to set a 100% waste diversion goal for the first event. An event or operation is typically thought of as “Zero Waste” if 80% or more of the event waste is diverted from the landfill or incineration. **Remember: while 80% or higher waste diversion is the goal, any level of waste reduction is a step in the right direction.**

Be sure to set goals that can easily be measured during the event (e.g., pounds of waste diverted or number of recycling bags collected). If you can’t measure your success, you won’t be able to brag about it!

DETERMINE YOUR WASTE DIVERSION METHODS

Below is a list of methods to help you think through what will work for your event. Remember: a zero waste event is not

achieved by only adding recycling and composting bins. Make a plan for how to manage discarded items that aren’t appropriate for recycling or composting.

Determine necessary waste collection services based on the diversion methods you have selected (e.g., trash, recycling, composting). Venues will often offer some of these services as part of your contract. If they don’t, then you’ll need to arrange for a service for pick up at the end of your event.

REFUSE: Refuse to accept items or services that do not support your zero waste efforts. Avoid using disposable items and minimize food packaging and other event materials, like paper flyers or single-use giveaways.

REUSE: Reuse items or resources from previous events to decrease the demand for newly manufactured goods. This can include tablecloths, serving platters, decorations, and signage, just to name a few.

RECYCLE: Arrange for recycling service for your event. Recycling turns waste into a commodity used to manufacture a new product (e.g., aluminum cans, rigid plastics).

COMPOST: Arrange for composting service at your event. Composting organic materials including leftover food (sometimes meat and bone), paper, and other natural products generates a useful soil amendment that adds nutrients and helps retain moisture for growing plants, flowers, and vegetables.



IT’S REQUIRED!

At a minimum, event planners are required to provide recycling for permitted special events (typically parades, walks, runs, bike rides, or festivals). The Mayor’s Special Events Planning Guide details these permit requirements.

SECTION 1

PLANNING FOR WASTE

RETURN: Make arrangements for returning unopened or unused goods (e.g., drinks) to the retailer or distributor. Most vendors will offer a credit or refund.

DONATE: Donate used or unused, durable goods and textiles (e.g., costumes, props, décor) and unopened, non-perishable food items. Donors may qualify for a tax deduction.

MAKE SUSTAINABLE DECISIONS

CHOOSING A VENUE

- Whether indoor or outdoor, event venues may have established sustainability or waste reduction programs. Ask venue managers about their waste management practices before you confirm the location.
- If your chosen location does not have publicly accessible recycling and composting bins, confirm their willingness to work with you to meet your zero or reduced waste goals.

BUYING SUPPLIES

- The most efficient way to reduce waste is to prevent it at the source. Consider purchasing items that are reusable, recyclable, or compostable instead of single-use and plastic items.
- The District of Columbia requires all food service businesses (e.g., vending trucks or carts, food trucks and other businesses) to provide customers with only compostable or recyclable food service items.
- Refer to the Mayor's List of Recyclables and Compostables and the Food Service Ware Requirements.
- To be certified compostable, products have to break down over a certain period of time and cannot leave any toxic or lingering plastic residues.
- Confirm with your collection service, venue maintenance team, or compost receiving facility the types of materials they can receive.
- When choosing event giveaways and souvenirs use the opportunity to provide attendees with tools to help reduce waste (e.g., branded water bottles).



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DESIGNING INVITATIONS

- Reducing paper waste from the start by using electronic invitations (e.g., Eventbrite, evite or Paperless Post) and e-marketing strategies to promote the event.

HIRING VENDORS

- Communicate to vendors and caterers that the event is zero or reduced waste.
- Refer to the Caterer and Vendor Guide and Sample Agreement.
- Work with them to source the right materials. Ask participating vendors and those staffing booths to eliminate products requiring bags and packaging where possible.

PLAN YOUR WASTE STATIONS

DESIGN AND LOCATION

- Depending on the size of your event, one waste station may suffice. For larger events, waste stations can be placed throughout the event, with one central collection area. Throughout the event, these individual waste stations will need to be emptied, and waste will need to be transported to the central collection area.
- A “back-of-house” collection for vendors and caterers provides opportunities to recover recyclable and compostable waste from vendors without interrupting the event.
- One waste station per 300 people is recommended.

SECTION 1

PLANNING FOR WASTE

- Consider what types of waste will be generated across the event space, to ensure you have the appropriate collection bin for each stream.
- The number of compostable collection bins should be equal to the number of recycling and trash bins available.
- Waste stations should be placed near food service and seating areas, in front of exits, and outside of bathrooms.
- Be sure your waste stations have clear signage that is easy to understand.
- Signs should be simple and should clearly communicate which items go in which receptacle.
- Use a consistent color scheme among receptacles and their respective signage (e.g., blue for recycling, green for composting).

STAFFING

Even with great signage, each waste station needs to be staffed to ensure consistent collection. Be sure everyone staffing your zero waste effort is prepared educate guests about why waste reduction matters. When developing your staffing plan, consider the peak times of use. This will impact your schedule for emptying or replacing collection containers and will help you determine how many people you need for a smooth operation.

Below are the roles and key responsibilities for staffing the zero waste aspect of your event. Based on the scale of your event, you may only need one or two volunteers, or you may need

several. **Remember: include trainings for event and venue staff to ensure proper diversion methods are followed.**

ZERO WASTE LEAD

A zero or reduced waste leader team can help champion efforts, manage logistics and communications, and keep everyone on track. This role is key to executing a successful zero or reduced waste event, and for managing expectations of both event staff and attendees.

- Manages volunteer shifts and collection logistics.
- Creates schedule for collecting waste from waste stations throughout the event and transporting to the central collection area
- Regularly communicates with venue and event planner about collection efforts and any obstacles, leading up to the event day.
- Reports back on goals and measurements, after the event is over

EDUCATOR

- Assists attendees with sorting waste at waste stations.
- Educates attendees on the importance of zero waste.
- At least one volunteer per waste station is recommended.

WASTE COLLECTOR

- Monitors and removes waste from stations throughout the event and transports to central collection areas.
- At least two volunteers on a rotating schedule is recommended.

VENDOR LIAISON

- Coordinates with vendors and caterers to educate them on the goals of the event, and to minimize the amount of waste (e.g., plastic-wrapped sandwiches) being brought into the event.
- Liaises with vendors and caterers regularly to ensure waste diversion adherence.
- Monitors and inspects all materials vendors and caterers bring into your event to ensure anything brought into the event is also taken back out.

SMALL-SCALE EVENTS

Zero waste isn't just about large-scale events. Small parties or meetings are great opportunities to engage your family, friends, colleagues, and peers about the importance of reducing waste.

- In invitations and advertisements, include an announcement that the event is aiming for zero waste.
- Avoid single-use items. Use reusable plates, cutlery, and glassware.
- Cloth napkins are a great replacement for paper napkins and can be laundered in one load.

SECTION 2

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR GUESTS

Each time you communicate with your attendees, there is an opportunity to include your zero waste efforts.

BEFORE THE EVENT

- Use your invitation or event announcement to inform attendees that your event will be zero waste.
- Share the diversion methods you have chosen and the economic, environmental, and social benefits of zero waste.
- Be sure to highlight and promote and partners and/or nonprofits to whom you may be donating leftover food and unused materials.
- Educate attendees about the waste diversion goals you've set for the event and how they can help.
- Always promote the theme "pack it in, pack it out," and ask guests to take with them whatever they may bring.

AT THE EVENT

- At the start of the event, attendees should be reminded about your zero waste efforts, and how to dispose of waste properly.
- Make it easy! Create an event map that highlights waste station locations.
- Take the opportunity to include educational signage at waste stations.

- Include signage at the point of distribution (e.g., food tables) to remind participants how and where to dispose of food, cutlery, etc.
- Throughout the event, use social media to promote your efforts! Show off your efforts with photos of the event in real time. Use the hashtag #ZeroWasteDC for even further amplification.

AFTER THE EVENT

- Following the event, measure the amount of waste your reduction efforts helped divert from landfills or incinerators (in many cases, your waste hauler will be able to provide the final weight of materials collected/diverted).
- Communicate your success! Assuming your goals were met (or exceeded), be sure to communicate your accomplishments with event guests, sponsors, and other stakeholders and recognize businesses, volunteers, and vendors that supported the zero waste effort at your event. You can do this through a press release, a blog post, and e-blast to attendees, and/or across your social media platforms.
- Did you end up donating anything left over to food banks or other community organizations? Share that good news!

SAY NO TO PLASTIC BOTTLES!

Single-use plastic water bottles are an unnecessary addition to the waste stream and come at an additional cost. Depending on the event, your caterer may be able to provide tap or filtered water. For larger events, consider hiring a water distributor.

SECTION 3

ZERO WASTE WORKBOOK