

The Business Case for Zero Waste

Zero Waste is a strategy modeled on nature's self-sustaining systems. Waste prevention starts with sustainable production. By using recyclable and compostable materials during an event, everybody from the planner to the consumer can participate and feel good about being a part of our world's environmental sustainability.

More event planners and businesses each day are realizing they have a tremendous opportunity to positively impact their communities and become environmental leaders.

Zero Waste does not only have a positive impact on the environment, it also has a positive impact on the event!

Planning a Zero Waste event can:

- ◆ Promote a positive image
- ◆ Increase visibility
- ◆ Increase participation and turnout
- ◆ Build community
- ◆ And increase profits

People love environmentally sustainable solutions!

Thanks to Eco-Cycle, the Lyons Chamber of Commerce, the Evergreen Alliance for Sustainability and the City of Oakland for these suggestions.

Zero Waste Event

PLANNING

...for events 10-150 people

Planning for Zero Waste

Organizing a Zero Waste event is a great way to be active in the environmental community. A Zero Waste event can be organized to be not only sustainable, but also cost effective.

Zero Waste activities include:

- ◆ Recycling
- ◆ Composting
- ◆ Reducing packaging
- ◆ Reusing materials
- ◆ Raising public awareness

Careful planning is the key to executing a Zero Waste event. Simply evaluate the necessary materials to be used and disposed of at the event, then implement recyclable or compostable alternatives. Simple solutions such as compostable or reusable cups, utensils and plates can make an enormous impact on the waste generated by an event.

There's no need for a trash can! If you plan for sustainable waste, then only recycling and compost are necessary. After the event every guest, employee and volunteer can be proud to be an environmental steward.



Getting started is easy! First, designate a primary contact for Zero Waste activities. This can be any dedicated individual from paid staff to volunteers. Then, follow these eight easy steps to ensure a fun, clean and waste-free event!

BEGIN SEVERAL WEEKS (OR MONTHS) BEFORE THE EVENT

Zero Waste STEP 1

Finalize the dates, location and layout of the event far in advance to facilitate the later stages of Zero Waste planning.

- ◆ Does the venue offer recycling and composting services already?
- ◆ What is the cost of providing these services during the event?
- ◆ How many people will be attending?
- ◆ What kind of materials will visitors generate?

It is important to accurately evaluate the volume of people and materials that will be used. Vendors will typically produce more materials than a catered event, and many catering companies offer reusable materials and zero waste alternatives. Always ask for reusable, recyclable or compostable products from your vendor or caterer.

For large events such as weddings or conferences, local waste management companies such as Western Disposal and Eco-Cycle can provide recycling and composting services. See all the great resources at the back of this document for contact information.

Complete your planning well in advance, so you can determine costs and services. This will allow time for the compost and recycling provider to work out collection details with your venue (time of pick-up, room for collection trucks, etc.).

Be sure in your invitation and your discussions with people to remind everyone involved that you are hosting a “Zero Waste” event. Depending on the event, it is usually easy to promote involvement. For example, an invitation to a meeting can encourage each invitee to bring a reusable mug or refillable water bottle. A potluck invitation can encourage guests to bring reusable dishes, flatware, cups or glasses and napkins, as appropriate.

TIPS

- ◆ Put “Zero Waste Event” on your invitation or registration form!
- ◆ When you send your invitations, try an electronic version to reduce waste.
- ◆ For business meetings, remember to add Zero Waste language and any requests (such as “bring your own cup”) to the registration forms.

Think about your menu, decorations, program, and other event needs.

- ♦ What foods and drinks will be served/available to guests?
- ♦ How much food and drink is there going to be?
- ♦ What kind of tableware will be required?

Zero waste strategies can be applied to all aspects of an event.

- ♦ Decorations can be compostable or reusable.
- ♦ If there is a giveaway consider giving away seeds, candles or edibles in reusable jars.

If you prefer single-use service, most grocery and hardware stores offer easy access to BPI-certified compostable dishes and flatware. Remember: biodegradable does not mean compostable.*

Consider these costs and any potential savings during the planning stage:

- ♦ Collection service – Many times this service can be provided at the same cost of garbage disposal.
- ♦ Compostable utensils, cups and plates – many products are available. Shop around for the best prices.
- ♦ Volunteers – check with your church, school or service club for volunteers.
- ♦ Dishwashing – if you use china or glass, this service might need to be hired out; check with your caterer or rental service.

* Be sure to look for the words "BPI certified" on items you purchase with the intent to compost. Not all products labeled "compostable" or "biodegradable" on the package can be composted locally.

Some paper plates and cups are lined with a thin layer of plastic. Items marked "biodegradeable" will break down over time, but still leave plastic residue behind. More information is available at (www.bpiworld.org/science-of-biodegradation).



Zero Waste Station

Here is an easy solution: You can buy a "Zero Waste Event Kit" from Eco-Cycle. The kits contain 25 each of plates, bowls, cups and flatware made from recycled paper, plant starch or sugarcane. Each kit comes with a compost collection container, liner bag and signs. Be sure to use your home or office compost collection bins for these items or your contracted compost service. Dishware is not designed to break down in backyard compost bins, but will easily break down in an industrial compost facility.

TIPS

TIPS

When is “Compostable” Not Compostable? Look for BPI Certification

Although touted as “environmentally friendly,” several so-called biodegradable plastic products do not biodegrade as expected. Specifications and tests now exist that scientifically prove a material will biodegrade completely and safely when composted in a large facility, leaving no residues.

Products are tested in approved, independent laboratories (Biodegradable Products Institute). Scientists with the American Society for Testing and Materials check the data to verify that the products meet requirements and specifications. The specifications used by the BPI are a result of eight years of intensive work by renowned scientists and the composting industry. Passing these specifications mean that a product will biodegrade completely, quickly and safely—just like yard trimmings and food scraps. Specifications are designed to cover plastic films and bags and packaging that are designed to be composted, including plastic coated paper and board.



Here are some more helpful suggestions to ensure a successful Zero Waste event:

- ◆ Use water dispensers with paper cups that don't have a plastic coating, or pitchers of water, instead of plastic bottles.
- ◆ Whenever possible, serve dishes “family style” such as sandwich platters, salad or chips bowls, etc. to avoid individually packaged products.
- ◆ Ask your caterer to provide small reusable dishes for creamer and condiments instead of individually wrapped ketchup, mayo, mustard, salt, pepper, or sugar.
- ◆ Serve finger foods such as veggies and dip, cheese, crackers, skewers of fruit or grilled meat, etc. These items don't require utensils, and trash isn't created from individual wrappers.
- ◆ Provide straws and stirrers only upon request. If using straws, make sure they are compostable.
- ◆ Make arrangements to donate any usable leftovers to a food bank or shelter.

Planning a festival or large conference?

- ◆ Vendors and exhibitors will need their own diversion stations, away from attendees.
- ◆ Compost container liner bags are the most expensive item you will purchase; other materials are cost-competitive with other paper items.
- ◆ Even large events such as the Rocky Grass Festival in Lyons have implemented cost-effective Zero Waste solutions such as reusable tableware!

Get volunteers!

People love to volunteer for the environment!

If you are expecting a large group, ask friends or colleagues to help monitor the recycling stations and direct attendees to the proper container. Many people are willing to donate their time for a good cause. Consider placing an ad in the newspaper or on the internet. Get their commitment in advance, and make sure your helpers are comfortable with your system. Make sure your volunteers are educated on Zero Waste initiatives in order to answer questions from attendees!

If possible, enlist their help in preparing signs to put on the recycling and compost stations. This can be a fun arts and crafts project!

Prepare signs and announcements to help guests know they have entered a “Zero Waste Zone!”

Determine how many “Zero Waste” stations you will need:

Figure on one station for every 25 guests if you are providing single-use dishes or bottled beverages; fewer if your event will be catered or if you will provide only finger foods. Make signs for each station.

Recycling signs: Sign styles vary from simple to complex and the best feature either photos or examples of specific Zero Waste materials attached by Velcro. Different versions are available at the city of Boulder and Boulder County websites.

Compost signs: Since your compostable cups might be mistaken for recyclable plastic, be sure to post additional signs on your compost bin. Include pictures or samples of the compostable products on the signs.



See the “Resources” section at the back of this document and choose a style of sign that works for your event - or make your own with this information:

Recycle: Empty plastic containers: bottles, jugs, jars and tubs Lids are OK only when screwed back on to empty plastic bottles.; Paper; Cardboard; Empty glass bottles and jars (no lids); Empty cans (Please empty liquids first).

JUST BEFORE THE EVENT

Zero Waste STEP 5

Make sure all of your supplies are ready to set out in preparation for the event.

- ◆ Ask your volunteers to show up a little early to help set up.
- ◆ Remember to only set out items for use that can be reused, recycled or composted. Make sure to remove trash cans from your event, since you've made them obsolete and they might confuse people. Instead, replace those cans with recycling and compost containers.
- ◆ Post paper signs on surfaces in high-traffic areas such as the entryway of your event and on tables to announce your Zero Waste commitment.
- ◆ For smaller events, use your own business or household recycling container. You can also reserve collapsible recycling bins (available from Eco-Cycle) to collect bottles and cans for recycling at your event. Use signs to make the containers visible and make guidelines simple for guests.
- ◆ Recycling and compost bins should be arranged in pairs so choices are clear. Where there is a kitchen, a pair of recycling / compost bins should be available for use by kitchen personnel.
- ◆ A pail for liquids that can later be emptied down the drain should be placed next to each pair of bins to help with clean-up and leaks.
- ◆ When a bar is set up to serve drinks, supply bartender(s) with bins for recycling empty bottles and aluminum cans. Bins are for bartenders' use only and should be placed behind their tables and not where the public will use them for trash. Buckets in which to toss excess liquids before recycling the containers should be placed near bins. Bartenders should fold cardboard boxes and set them aside for later recycling.

DURING THE EVENT

Zero Waste STEP 6

Hold your wildly successful and popular Zero Waste event!

As guests arrive, let them know you're hosting a Zero Waste event and help them participate.

Zero Waste STEP 7

Place recyclable and compostable materials in their appropriate collection containers.

Note: Compostable dishes, flatware and cups are designed to be broken down in a commercial composting environment. If you don't have compost collection at your home or business, you can bring the materials to the Center for Hard to Recycle Materials (CHaRM) or to Western Disposal, both in Boulder, for composting in a local commercial facility.

For a meeting, add "Zero Waste Education" to the agenda

- ◆ At the beginning of your meeting, make a Zero Waste announcement similar to the following: "Welcome everyone. This is a Zero Waste meeting; please deposit your paper, bottles and cans into the recycling containers. The compost container is for your uneaten food, paper plates, napkins, and cups, and compostable knives and forks. Thank you for your help making this a zero waste meeting."
- ◆ Display the agenda in a general area for all to see instead of making paper copies.
- ◆ Make the last item on the agenda a reminder that repeats the Zero Waste message: "Thank you for attending and please remember to place your paper, etc..."

TIPS

AFTER THE EVENT

Clean up.

- ◆ Pack leftover food in reusable containers. Invite your guests to take home any leftovers. Any packaged beverages or similar items that are still in their unopened containers can be donated to food banks.
- ◆ Collect all the remaining food scraps, dishware, paper items such as agendas or handouts and place in the proper recycling or compost containers. Peek into recycling and compost containers to insure they're not "contaminated" with inappropriate materials. This will help you determine whether your signs and volunteers did the trick.
- ◆ Small items can be moved to the appropriate containers, but severely contaminated bags of recycling or composting will likely be handled as "trash" by your service provider.
- ◆ Remember to avoid toxic chemicals when cleaning. Diluted vinegar can be used to clean counters, windows, appliances and most floors (not wood floors). Add a little baking soda when cleaning the sink or for scrubbing.

Measure and celebrate your success.

It is important to show and share your successes and any setbacks in order to improve the culture shift towards Zero Waste. Here are four ideas:

- ◆ Track and measure your efforts. The first Boulder County Zero Waste Event Planning meeting wasted only three pieces of tape-- Nearly Zero Waste!
- ◆ Share your efforts and accomplishments with your peers and guests.
- ◆ Place information on your website promoting your organization's green initiative.
- ◆ Fill out a Zero Waste Survey. Eco-Cycle offers an online survey for users of its Zero Waste kits, visit www.eco-cycle.org/zwevents/kits/feedback.cfm.

Make notes to yourself and with your team about ways to improve for the next event.

Remember: *You can make a difference! With Zero Waste event planning, we can not only be constructive environmental leaders in our communities, but the efforts we put forth now will serve as an example for future efforts and other communities worldwide.*

Zero Waste STEP 8

Zero Waste STEP 9

Zero Waste RESOURCES

For more information, contact Boulder County at 303-441-3522.
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Education

- **Boulder County recycling information and signs:**

www.bouldercountyrecycles.org

[www.bouldercounty.org/find/library/gogreen/
ssrecyclingguideline.pdf](http://www.bouldercounty.org/find/library/gogreen/ssrecyclingguideline.pdf)

- **City of Boulder recycling and compost signs:**

[www.bouldercolorado.gov/index.php?option=com_content&vie
w=article&id=15823&Itemid=87](http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15823&Itemid=87)

Recycling and Composting Collection Services

Eco-Cycle: www.ecocycle.org/zero-waste-events

Western Disposal: [www.westerndisposal.com/special_
event_services.php](http://www.westerndisposal.com/special_event_services.php)

Drop-off-Sites for Recycling / Composting

CHaRM, the Center for Hard to Recycle Materials:

www.ecocycle.org/charm

Western Disposal: www.westerndisposal.com

Supplies – compostable dishes and tableware

- **Cen-Tex Supply: \$50 minimum order and will-call service**

Tom McCarthy, 303-442-8477 x112

tommccarthy@centexsupply.com

- **U.S. Foodservice: \$500 minimum order**

Boulder/North Denver – Joe Burke

303-420-5840, 1-800-222-2480 x5185

Ft. Collins/Greeley/Longmont – Ray Young

1-800-222-2480 x5181

- **Corporate Express: No minimum order**

Jolane DeClercq, Local representative

303-307-5713, Jolane.declercq@cexp.com

Eco-Cycle sells a variety of compostable materials at their ecoStore. Visit the “party kits” section of www.ecocycle.org/ecostore

Some local grocers carry compostable dishes, cups and flatware. One popular brand is “World Centric.” Some paper plates that aren’t coated with plastic can also be composted, as can most paper napkins. Look for a certificate of compostability, such as the BPI certification, before you buy!