



CLEAN AIR BALTIMORE
COALITION

Guide For Planning Zero Waste Events

Community Meetings and Public Events

Why zero waste?

The goal is to get our waste footprint and consumption of single-use items down to zero as much as feasibly possible. Why?! So that we can all do our part to stop sending trash to burn at the incinerator or fill up space at the landfill. As individuals, we have the power to stop participating in the polluting services of the “throw-away” system. There is no “away.” Everything that we “throw away” leaves a trace on our community. Some traces are more visible than others, such as the short term impact of litter and longer term impacts on public health through burning and burying. If there’s waste, then there is a waste of resources, meaning time, energy and money.

What to do about it.

Reuse is the solution, and we all have a part to play. Whether we’re an individual community member, small business owner, government employee, or head of a corporation. Start with having a conversation and understanding where your waste stream is coming from, similar to a waste audit; What’s coming from where and can you ask them to take it back and figure out a reuse solution?

Take an inventory of the single-use items used in a single event or community meeting.

- How low can you go?
- How many of these meal/beverage items can be reusable?

Avoid single use for the following:

- Individuals
- Cups
- Plates
- Utensils
- Food storage/Leftover/Take out containers
- Napkins
- (What’s missing?)

****Considerations for folks with disabilities****

Are there folks attending to consider their accessibility as it relates to meals/beverages? Other considerations? Ask them to bring their own straw as we all have a part to play.

- Straws (reusable)

Vendor food service materials

- Food service trays for bulk serving, avoid single serve and pre-packaged
- Food service utensils
- Beverage in bulk, avoid single serve and pre-packaged
- Cleaning rags
- (What's missing?)

Event host

- Tablecloths
- (What other consumables?)

Trash/Recycling/Compost infrastructure

Depending on the location of your event, there will at least be trash services available. Recycling and compost will take a coordinated effort to find a place to drop off and is a volunteer opportunity. For composting solutions, depending on the size of your event, if someone composts at home or in a nearby garden could be a solution for food scraps. For larger events, consider your local compost service businesses. (See references below)

- Trash bins
- Recycling bins
- Place to drop off trash and recycling, if not handled by venue
- Compost buckets for food scraps and accepted "compostable" items, depending on the compost service provider
- Place to drop off compost

Dishwashing materials:

- 3 bins for 3-bin-system (soap/water/sanitizer)
- Blue sanitizer tablets
- Loofah sponge or reusable dish rag
- Non-toxic dish soap
- Dish rack
- Table for dish washing station
- Towels for drying

???Questions???

Q. You may be asking, "who's going to do the dishes?"

A. Either the food vendor is able to handle the dishes or the event host, but even that is too big of a task for one person. Asking everyone to do their part is inherent in the zero waste movement.

- Vendors: Is there the capacity to have an extra helper? Remember, avoiding the cost of buying single use items, shifts the cost savings to hired help (reuse is a job creator) or, is there capacity in down-time during the event to do the dishes?
- Hosts: Communicate needs for a volunteer to wash the dishes in this collaborative, communal effort to adopt zero waste events. Ideally, if everyone brings their own everything: dish/cup/utensil and takes their own dishes home with them, there won't be a need for washing dishes.

Communications/Blurbs for Setting Expectations

To Attendees:

“This is a zero-waste event! You’re encouraged to Bring Your Own Everything: cup/plate/utensil/cloth napkin. A takeout container is suggested to both eat out of and so you can take leftovers home with you. We all have a part to play to make it to zero waste so please do your part and BYOE. The trash incinerator is the city’s biggest stationary air polluter. Our mission is to divert as much trash as possible so we can stop polluting our communities by sending our trash to burn at the incinerator.”

(If you set up a dishwashing station) “A dishwashing station will be provided for your convenience and is self-serve with volunteers to help guide you.”

To Vendors:

“In our zero waste efforts we need your enthusiastic participation! All vendors are expected to pack it in and pack it out. It is our obligation to leave this public space better than we found it. We all have a part to play. It is the expectation that if you brought it to this space that you can also take it away from the space with you. The burden of trash services is unequal so we’re insisting that everyone does their part to minimize trash brought to the event and to remove all of the trash that you generated and take it with you. Trash/recycling/composting services are provided for the use of attendees and is an educational opportunity to learn how to starve the incinerator if they had come prepared with their own cup/plate/utensil.”

Things To Consider

- Consider what is needed to prepare food and to transport it. How much waste is at the end of an event and how much can be avoided?
- The expectation is for folks to come prepared with their own supplies. If everyone does their part then vendors can stop buying single-use items to provide for them. And for when folks do come unprepared with their own, is it feasible to carry items that customers can rent or borrow?
- Switching to reusable items would be a one-time investment and after just a couple events, it pays for itself, and would eliminate the amount of trash and save money and resources.
- Everyone has a part to play to lighten the waste impact on the event; vendors are expected to adopt the Leave No Trace principle: Pack in, pack out. i.e. if you brought it in, you can take it out with you.
- All participants must separate recycling and compost away from trash. Buckets will be provided for composting all food waste materials.

Useful Tips for All

- Open up all new items that you're using before bringing it to the event. Example if you're bringing a chair/table or other new item to use, remove it from the box and plastic packaging and throw that away before bringing it to the event, only bring the item. This will minimize the trash sorting efforts at the end of the event.
- Beware of false solutions of "compostable" food ware. It's still a single-use waste item and comes at a premium cost. And if it's not being disposed of in a composting system then it's not solving the problem of single-use and is a false solution. The same is true for recyclables.
- Another problem of compostables is the toxic element of PFAS found in compostables; These are "forever chemicals" and according to the CDC are linked to health risks such as cancer, liver damage, decreased fertility and increased risk of asthma.

Remember!

- The goal is to divert waste from trash into proper recycling and composting systems and to stop polluting our communities. Reuse, recycling, and compost = zero waste!
- We all have a part to play. Ideally, most participants will come prepared with their own items for eating and drinking to minimize waste produced at the event to make this a low-to-zero waste event as much as possible.

Outcomes

- Hosts do their best to communicate the expectations and impact and to organize needed reuse infrastructure.
- Vendors and attendees all do their best to come prepared.
- We all take part in the dialogue and learn together how to do zero waste.

Composting Resources

Ideally, compost could be done on site. However, if that is not an option there are services available. Each composting service accepts different "compostables." Some will accept only veggie food scraps while others accept all food scraps including meat, and others will also accept certain "compostable" items other than just food scraps. Depending on what will be served at your event will need to be considered for which service you will need.

<https://baltimorecompostcollective.org/>

<https://compostcab.com/>

<https://www.veterancompost.com/>