



# Guidance on Special Event Recycling

**Overview:** It's important to keep in mind that special event recycling, especially for larger events, can be a challenge due to the extra coordination that may be involved, sometimes extra costs, and higher risk for contamination within the recycling receptacles, however having recycling at special events is vital towards encouraging recycling throughout a community and fostering a culture of environmental stewardship.

- **Start Planning Early:** When planning to implement waste reduction and recycling at special events it's important to start the process as early as possible in order to communicate recycling is a priority and not an afterthought.
- **Map out the flow of waste from point of generation to disposal, to collection, to haul out**
- **Think of the 5 W's (Who, What, When, Where, Why):**
  - **Who?**
    - **Who is generating waste?** (vendors, patrons, decorators, etc.)
    - **Who will be emptying receptacles during the event?** (staff, volunteers, green team, etc.)
    - **Who will be providing the receptacles and collection for the event?** (municipality, hauler, etc.)
  - **What?**
    - **What types of waste will be generated?**
      - Regular garbage
      - Targeted recyclables (cardboard, cans, bottles, paper, glass, etc.)
      - Food waste
      - Forgotten reusable goods (guests may leave behind backpacks, chairs, bottles, sunglasses, etc. which can be donated to a charity or placed in a lost and found)
      - Any problematic or bulky waste (e.g., confetti at a concert, construction break down materials from temporary exhibits, disposable heating blankets for a winter marathon, etc.)
    - **What local ordinances do you need to follow?** (single-use plastic ban, collection fees, etc.)
    - **What types of receptacles for garbage and recyclables will be used?** (roll-carts, dumpsters, temporary waste stations, etc.)
  - **When?**
    - **When will waste be generated?** (Before event begins, during setup, during the event, after the event, any specific points during the event that generate a lot of waste, etc.)



- **When will recycling and waste receptacles be emptied?** (During the event, after the event, etc.)
- **Where?**
  - **Where will waste be generated?** Think about physical points of waste generation at the site (at vendor booths, by patrons, back of the house operations, etc.)
  - **Where will receptacles be placed?** Best practice is to have 1 to 1 ratio with a recycling receptacle directly adjacent to a garbage receptacle. If you have more garbage receptacles than recycling receptacles make sure the few recycling containers are placed directly adjacent to a garbage container.
- **Why?** Communicating why recycling is important via signage and public service announcements during the event, on program materials, in registration confirmation emails, and post event thank you emails, etc. all help promote the cultural shift towards more environmental awareness. Communicate the success achieved to stakeholders, volunteers, and patrons to help with buy-in the next year. Images on recycling signage often works better than text.
- **Signage & Sorting**
  - Uniform, clear signs with pictures will go a long way to increase education and accuracy for acceptable items during sorting. Pictures of items sold right on site will eliminate the guess work.
- **Trash & Recycling Bins**
  - Additional pictures and bullet points on recycling and trash bins can help out as well for even more clarity and direction for guests and staff.
  - Uniformity is key and can lead to less confusion. Same color and shape bins for recycling containers (i.e., blue) and same color and shape bins for trash containers (i.e., black). Clear plastic bags to hold recyclables vs opaque black trash bags for garbage.
  - Patrons may avoid touching trash can lids if they must push a (sticky) flap open and may opt for using the recycling bin with an open top to drop trash in or vice versa. Thus, it might be beneficial to procure trash cans that don't require guests to push open a flap.
  - Recycling and trash bins must be seen as equal and equally accessible. Make sure recycling bins have a trash can immediately next to it. If a guest has to take too many steps to reach the recycling bin, they will opt for the trash can.
- **Data Tracking and Reporting Is Vital**
  - If you can quantify the amount of waste diverted from the landfill that is a great communication tool and can also be used with online "environmental calculators" to put it into measurements people can better understand (i.e., X number of trees saved, or Y number of cars taken off the road due to avoided emissions, etc.)



- **Uniform Training and Education**
  - Make sure all event staff, volunteers, vendors, etc. have a list of which items can be recycled and are made aware of the recycling efforts at the event.
- **Reduce Double Handling of Material**
  - If food vendors will be producing a lot of cardboard, you can ask them to break down the boxes placed behind their food truck as an example so that it cuts down on unsightly piles of waste and makes it more efficient for staff or volunteers to collect it for recycling.
  - Litter begets more litter. We want patrons and staff to take pride and care of the venue so setting a good example is key.
- **Waste Reduction**
  - Continue to develop messaging for waste reduction. Patrons may not be aware they can enter the venue with reusable bottles and access the water dispensers on site as an example. Reminders can be given when purchasing a ticket, etc. Reusable bottles will save money for the individual in the long run but vendors on site may take issue as they would lose business on lost water bottle sales, etc.
  - Consider eliminating unnecessary plastic items from being sold on the property or even provide a list of preferred food and beverage items that are more sustainable for food vendors to select from. Recycling has its limitations and still requires energy input to do while waste reduction is the easiest method in terms of energy and cost.
- **Seek Assistance:** Many local government solid waste and recycling staff are willing to provide guidance upon request, so it does not hurt to ask. You may also be able to get assistance from the waste hauler that provides collection for the event to see if they can assist with setting up a recycling program.