

ZERO WASTE MARIN

ZERO WASTE EVENT GUIDE: STEPS TO A SUSTAINABLE EVENT



Marin County is striving to reduce landfill waste through recycling, composting, and reducing unnecessary packaging. Thank you for helping us reach our goals by utilizing zero waste best practices for your event!

This guide has been prepared by Zero Waste Marin staff to help events hosted in Marin County to produce less landfill waste. If you have questions about this guide, please contact us at zerowaste@marincounty.gov.

Table of Contents:

Contents

Table of Contents:	2
Pre-Event Planning.....	3
Working with Vendors.....	3
Initial Communications	3
Review the Rules on “Compostable” Plastics with Vendors.....	3
Utilizing Zero Waste Contracts.....	4
Setting Up Infrastructure.....	5
Create Waste Stations	5
Signage.....	5
Zero Waste Staff and Volunteers.....	6
Ideas for Recruiting Volunteers	6
Identify a Zero Waste Leader	6
Volunteer Training.....	6
Volunteer Supplies.....	7
Waste Logistics During the Event.....	7
Waste Logistics After the Event.....	7

Appendices A, B, C, and D are included at the end of this guide.

Pre-Event Planning

There are steps that need to be taken while planning an event that minimizes waste. A quick reference of items that need to be done before your event includes:

- ✓ Communicate with vendors about how they will help support zero waste at your event, including purchasing of proper service ware, utensils, etc. If applicable, set up vendor contracts that put these stipulations in writing.
- ✓ Contact the hauler in your area to set up proper services for landfill, recycling, and compost.
- ✓ Determine how you will incorporate proper infrastructure, such as 3-bin (or 4-bin) sorting stations with landfill, recycling, and compost, into your event. This could include renting color-coded bins and asking for signage from Zero Waste Marin or your hauler.
- ✓ Hire a waste management service or recruit volunteers to manage waste during the event.
- ✓ Depending on the type of food served and number of attendees, your event could be required **by law** to donate any surplus edible food at the end of the event. For questions about this requirement, please contact us zerowaste@marincounty.gov.

Working with Vendors

Initial Communications

In preparation for your event, it is important to communicate with your vendors about what they are selling and how they can help your event minimize landfill waste. It is important to confirm the following with each of your vendors:

1. Let them know that vendors at events are required to comply with the [Marin County Reusable Foodware Ordinance](#).
2. Confirm with them that any takeaway food is served on truly compostable fiber products (no compostable plastics), or with truly recyclable materials such as aluminum foil.
 - a. Review the Compostable Serviceware Guide (Appendix A).
 - b. Review the following section about why compostable plastics are not accepted in Marin and confirm that your vendors know this.
3. Discuss other strategies to reduce waste, such as:
 - a. Providing condiments only in bulk, avoiding many small packets.
 - b. Not providing bags, unless upon request.

Review the Rules on “Compostable” Plastics with Vendors

Compostable plastics are not accepted at Marin’s commercial compost facility for a variety of reasons. Please review this section so that you are aware of the rules and are able to answer

any questions from your vendors. Zero Waste Marin staff are available for additional clarification. Compostable plastics are not accepted in Marin for the following reasons:

- Compostable plastics frequently do not break down during the composting process.
- Some compostable plastics may contain harmful chemicals such as PFOS and PFAS.
- Compostable plastics look very similar to their plastic counterparts, which can make it more challenging to remove contaminants from compost.
- When compostable plastics end up in oceans and bays, they behave similarly to petroleum-based plastics, resulting in litter pollution and potentially harming wildlife.
- Marin's compost facility produces certified organic compost; if compostable plastics were accepted, the finished compost could not be used on organic farms.

For all the above reasons the County's Reusable Foodware Ordinance prohibits the use of "compostable plastic" foodware at events.



Utilizing Zero Waste Contracts

Because the success of making an event zero waste hinges on the types of materials generated at the event, it is crucial to have your vendors on board. One way to do this is to ask vendors/caterers to sign a contract based on your agreed-upon event materials, food, and recycling and composting guidelines. Please see the Sample ZW Guidelines for Vendors (Appendix B); the below bullets are example contract requirements.

- Vendors will comply with the [Marin County Reusable Foodware Ordinance](#).
- Vendors will provide only truly recyclable or compostable options (in accordance with the Marin County Reusable Foodware Ordinance) for takeaway materials.
- Vendors will utilize the proper waste sorting bins (landfill, recycling, and compost) when disposing of any of their materials at the event, or you may suggest that they "pack-it-in, pack-it-out" and dispose of their waste at their place of business.
- Vendors will not give away or provide any non-durable items that may end up in the landfill shortly after distribution.

Setting Up Infrastructure

Create Waste Stations

Waste stations are locations – landfill, recycling, and compost – are available together in a convenient, easy-to-use system. Best practices for waste stations include:

1. Ensure stations are available in high-traffic areas, e.g. by main eating areas.
2. Waste stations should have bins that are color-coded (black or grey for landfill, blue for recycling, green for compost). Consider using bags that match these colors to reinforce for attendees (however, note that recycling and compost must be removed from bags when doing final disposal into hauler bins).
3. Each station should have clear signage labelling the different bins.
 - a. Include photos or 3D examples of what is accepted in each bin.
4. Assign waste monitors at waste stations to assist with sorting.
5. Ensure all stations are consistent and look the same.
6. Avoid “lonely” bins, e.g. bins without all sorting options located together.

Contact Zero Waste Marin for information on borrowing event stations.

Signage

Signage is critical to help remind attendees of zero waste efforts. At events, there are two main types of signage:

1. Sorting signage: Sorting signage is located by sorting stations, and is clearly labeled with “landfill”, “recycling”, and “compost”. Its purpose is to remind attendees of which bin is which, and what items can go in each bin.
2. Educational signage: Educates the attendees about your waste goals for the event (e.g. we are aiming to recycle and compost 75% of our waste!) and why waste sorting is important.

Zero Waste Marin and the various haulers in Marin have sorting signage available. Contact Zero Waste Marin or your hauler about sorting signage for your event.



Zero Waste Staff and Volunteers

Whether you decide to hire a paid waste management service or recruit volunteers to help with zero waste efforts, it is important to have people dedicated to reducing waste at your event. Each waste station should feature a trained volunteer or hired staff person who assists attendees, ensures that there is no contamination between bins, and helps increase public awareness.

First, determine how many volunteers are needed based on the number of waste stations at your event. You will also want to determine how many shifts of volunteers are needed based on how long your event is.



Ideas for Recruiting Volunteers

- Contact local community groups or service organizations.
- Reach out to local high schools; students are often required to complete community service, or a Green Club might be interested in volunteering.
- Conservation Corps North Bay or Green Mary are both options for paid station monitors.

Identify a Zero Waste Leader

- In addition to your team of volunteers, you should assign a Zero Waste Leader. This person will train and manage your volunteers.
- This person is likely to be part of your Event Staff rather than a volunteer. This person oversees all zero waste activity and is trained on all components of your event. The Zero Waste Leader should carry a complete set of event information that can be easily given to another trained person to take over if needed.
- This set of information should include multiple copies of the venue map, volunteer list and schedule, and zero waste talking points (Appendix C).

Volunteer Training

Volunteers will need to be trained to know how to staff waste stations. At minimum, volunteers must know which items at the event should go into which bins.

To implement your volunteer training:

1. Determine how you will be doing your training. Is it in the days before the event, or the morning of the event when they arrive?
 - a. If the training is before the event, is it in-person or online?
 - b. Who is leading the training?
2. Get examples of items being provided at the event from vendors.
3. Confirm where these items belong with the hauler or Zero Waste Marin.
4. Provide example items to the volunteers and teach them where these items must be sorted. Provide a one-page “cheat sheet”, if necessary.

Volunteer Supplies

Below is a list of supplies that will be helpful for your volunteers:

1. Identifying items such as lanyards, hats, or vests that help attendees recognize them as waste station helpers.
2. Gloves, trash grabbers, and extra bags to manage the waste stations.
3. A venue map with waste stations and disposal locations where bags will be emptied.

Waste Logistics During the Event

Below are some helpful questions to answer about day-of logistics at your event.

- ✓ How often will the bags be collected from waste stations?
- ✓ Who will pick up full bags from waste stations and bring them to the disposal location?
- ✓ Where will the bags be taken, and the collection bins be stored during the event (disposal location)?
- ✓ When will the hauler be picking up collection bins?
 - If your event is on a weekend, it is likely that the hauler will not pick up the collection bins for service until Monday, or that special weekend service will need to be coordinated. Plan for where collection bins will be stored until service.
- ✓ Who will be taking metrics to determine if you were successful in reducing waste?

Waste Logistics After the Event

Ensure the waste collected at stations makes its way to the collection bins that will be serviced by the hauler, and ensure you are aware of what day they are coming. Before the waste is collected, take photos of the final, sorted material to determine if there were any issues contamination, or if sorting was successful.

For additional guidance, see the Zero Waste Event Checklist (Appendix D).