

TOWARD ZERO WASTE EVENT PLANNER TOOLKIT

Whatcom County

A step-by-step guide for
caterers, food vendors, and venue spaces



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- Posters and Signage
- Preferred Compostable Food Service Items
- Toward Zero Waste Event Toolkit

Thank you to our partners for their support:



SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS

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OVERVIEW

Reducing waste may not be the first sustainable practice that comes to mind, but experts agree that better management of solid waste and its accompanying systems is crucial for protecting our environment, mitigating climate change, and using our resources more wisely. In the United States, approximately \$200 billion is spent on managing waste alone. In addition, forty percent of the food we produce is never eaten, and becomes the largest single component of waste in United States landfills – even more than plastic and paper.

Events of all sizes contribute large amounts of waste every year, due to the nature of events themselves. Events must be crafted to please attendees and ensure their satisfaction. Because of this, reducing waste is not automatically at the forefront of food producers' minds. However, the general public is becoming more aware of the issue of waste and are putting more importance on waste management at the events they attend.

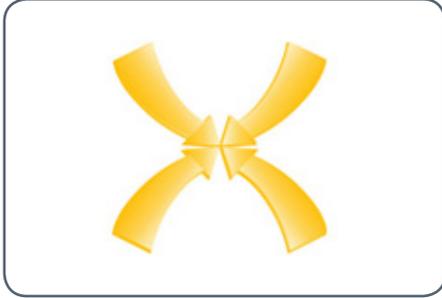
Caterers, food trucks, and venue spaces who plan waste reduction into their events will help your marketing efforts and reach a wider audience, during the event and after.

WHAT IS TOWARD ZERO WASTE?

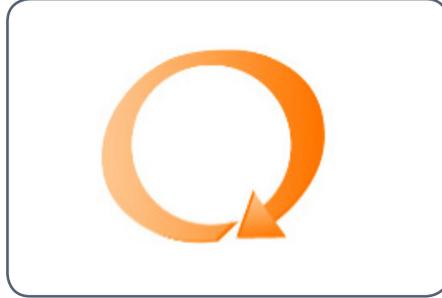
Toward Zero Waste (TZW) aims to reduce the amount of waste generated in the first place, while also increasing reuse, recycling, and composting of waste that is generated. Key components of TZW include:

- 1. REDUCE** the amount of material needed to be disposed of by the solid waste system. This should be the first priority. The goal is not only to reduce the amount of landfill waste produced but also reduce the need for materials to be recycled or composted. Examples of ways to reduce waste include providing water refill stations instead of selling bottled water, buying products with minimal packaging, and determining accurate quantities of food needed.
- 2. REUSE** items as many times as possible. This reduces the need to produce items in the first place, conserves resources, and keeps materials out of landfills. Recent estimates indicate Americans use nearly 4 billion pieces of disposable serving ware, for an average of less than 10 minutes, per year. Shifting to reusable serving ware whenever possible can make a huge impact.
- 3. RECYCLING AND COMPOSTING** comes after you have done all you can to reduce and reuse. Efforts should be made to produce as little waste as possible and then to recycle or compost as much as possible. Ideally, no waste would be sent to the landfill, but that isn't always feasible. A good goal is to have less than 10% of your overall waste stream go to the landfill.

CREATE A TOWARD ZERO WASTE PLAN



1. REDUCE



2. REUSE



3. RECYCLE AND COMPOST

When you have been hired to provide food at an event and want to make your Toward Zero Waste plan, it is important to achieve buy-in from your other staff members. Ensuring they understand the importance of waste reduction will ensure the success of your plan. Sustainable Connections can help you create a plan for your event and/or your business model.

A Toward Zero Waste plan will include the food you will be preparing for the event, what equipment you will need in order to keep the food at the proper temperature, the proper amount of durable plate-ware instead of disposables, containers for storing any excess food at the end of the event, and how to donate any excess food to a hunger relief organization. If you have flexibility in what you can prepare for an event, keep in mind how any excess food may be re-used in other recipes for future events, and free up the freezer space necessary in your kitchen to store it afterwards.

Sustainable Connections has a Squatch Food Waste program for taking left-over, edible, and safely-prepared food from businesses and events and delivering it to hunger relief agencies in Whatcom County. Contact Mark@sustainableconnections.org for information on how you can participate. Just keeping any potentially hazardous food under the right temperature control, and properly storing it afterwards if necessary, is all you need to do to be able to donate that food at the end of your event.

If you believe you will have food leftover, you can contact Sustainable Connections ahead of time. Pickups can be arranged to occur at the event, or the following day at your commercial kitchen.



CATERERS



Many caterers use durable plates and silverware at events, already putting you ahead of the pack when it comes to reducing your waste!

If you believe you may have excess food at the end of an event you will be catering, you can contact Sustainable Connections ahead of time to give us warning that you may be calling day-of for food recovery!

When you arrive at your event, you can do the following to get your station set up for toward zero waste success!

- Line up the proper waste bins to accurately capture all of your organic waste. Check with your venue host if you cannot find the right recycling, compost, and landfill bins.
- Educate your employees on where disposable items you have brought to the event should be disposed of. If you need help purchasing recyclable or compostable items, Sustainable Connections can assist you.
- Use your staff members to collect the plates from each guest, to ensure all organic waste is composted after the meal, and to reduce contamination of the waste bins.
- At the end of the event, pack up any excess food that you believe you may be able to re-use for another event in reusable containers.
- If you have excess food that has been kept at temperature for the duration of the event, and you have followed all health codes, you may also contact Sustainable Connections to arrange a pick up, to donate your excess food to a hunger relief organization.



FOOD TRUCKS

Coming to an event with your food truck can pose unique constraints around your toward zero waste plan. You do not have full control of what other food and serving items are being brought into the venue space, but with your plan, you can ensure that your truck will be seen as a toward zero waste business to all event attendees.

- Include in your plan how you will serve each item. Minimal serving-ware will help you reduce your waste. Choose compostable items only, including paper and compostable plastic utensils.
- Prioritize serving items that will not require utensils in order to eat to reduce the amount of waste being produced overall.
- Hand out disposable condiments, napkins, and utensils only if requested.
- When choosing compostable materials, look for the words “certified compostable” or look for this symbol:

COMPOSTABLE
IN INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES

Check locally, as these do not exist in many communities. Not suitable for backyard composting. CERT # SAMPLE

BPI®
- Compostable utensils can be found and ordered at cedar-grove.com. Make sure any products you buy says “certified compostable” or has the BPI certification on the box. “Sustainable” on the label does not mean that it is compostable.
- If you have excess food that has been kept at temperature for the duration of the event, you may also contact Sustainable Connections to arrange a pick up, to donate your excess food to a hunger relief organization.

VENUE SPACES

As venue operators, you have an excellent opportunity to help the events hosted at your venue be Toward Zero Waste! Waste will always be generated at events, but you can do simple things to help the caterers and food vendors at your event reduce that waste:

RECYCLE

- Provide appropriate recycling, composting, and landfill bins in your venue.
- Make sure all bins are well-signed. Signage is available from Sustainable Connections.
- Monitor frequently for contamination of waste streams. If it is occurring, determine why and make corrections.
- Recruit Toward Zero Waste volunteers to act as waste station monitors, helping event attendees know how to dispose of their items.

It is somewhat counterintuitive that recycling and composting are the last steps before sending waste to landfill. In fact, all beneficial uses of an item should be exhausted before more energy and resources are used to transform or repurpose it.

Moving away from single-use items is important for our environment, and thinking durable, recyclable, and compostable will help us get there. As you continue your toward zero efforts, find opportunities to switch to durables.

COMPOST

Whatcom County is fortunate to have a commercial composting facility centrally located and near many businesses. This keeps costs reasonable and reduces the carbon footprint of hauling compostable waste. Additionally, commercial composting facilities create more local jobs.

- Make sure all bins are well-signed. Signage is available from Sustainable Connections.
- Use compostable bin liners only where necessary. Otherwise, keep the bins unlined.



FOOD SAFETY

Once you have confirmed an event, follow these tips to ensure that food is prepared, stored, and packaged safely to be able to donate it after your event to a hunger relief agency, either through Sustainable Connections or on your own.

This is not only a more cost-effective way to handle your waste, but serves a better purpose than ending up in landfill.

The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Safety act protects donors and the recipient agency against liability, excepting only gross negligence and/or intentional misconduct as long as donations are made to a nonprofit and not individuals.



TIPS:

All potentially hazardous food must be kept at the correct temperature during the event, whether out on a supervised buffet line or held in the kitchen/truck.

To recover food from a buffet line, all hot dishes must be kept in a chafing dish kept at the right temperature. All cold dishes, like salad, cut fruit, or deli salads, must be kept on ice. A simple tray or bowl filled with ice underneath the plate or bowl of food is sufficient.

At the end of your event, properly cool all hot-held food in 2-inch pans and bring to a safe, cool temperature within four hours. Donating chilled food the morning after your event is the best way to ensure the safety of the food donated. Either keep the food in original hotel pans or transfer to food-grade storage containers.

CONTACTS:

SANITARY SERVICE COMPANY (SSC)

composting, recycling, and garbage
360-389-2025
www.ssc-inc.com

NOOKSACK VALLEY DISPOSAL & RECYCLING

(Lynden, Everson, Nooksack & Sumas)
composting, recycling, and garbage
(360)-354-3400
www.nvd-inc.com

WHTCOM COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

questions regarding health and safety of food
(360) 778-6000
www.whatcomcounty.us/360/Health-Department