

Toward Zero Waste
EVENT
TOOLKIT
Whatcom County

A step-by-step guide for your event



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TOOLKIT

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View SustainableConnections.org for additional information such as:

- Sample Toward Zero Waste Vendor Agreement
- Volunteer Recruiting & Training Guidelines
- Posters and Signage
- Preferred Compostable Food Service Items

Thank you to our partners:



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Overview

Reducing waste may not be the first sustainable practice that comes to mind, but experts agree 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.

Due to a number of factors, events large and small are major contributors to the worldwide waste problem. For many event organizers, the main goal is to ensure their attendees

have a positive, outstanding, and memorable experience. Reducing waste may not be deemed a top priority to organizers, but to many attendees, it is important and is becoming more so.

Event and festival goers increasingly expect events to be managed in a sustainable manner, with waste reduction, recycling and composting being some of the main components attendees are looking for. Waste reduction is one of the most visible sustainable practices you can implement at your event. Done right, a successful Toward Zero Waste event will leave lasting positive impressions that you can use to increase your event promotion, marketing, and overall attendee satisfaction.

What is Toward Zero Waste?

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

- 1. Reducing** the amount of material needed to be disposed of by the solid waste system 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. Reusing** items as many times as possible 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 before they are discarded – per year. Shifting to reusable serving ware whenever possible is a key component of events.
- 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 possible. A good goal is to have less than 10% of your overall waste stream go to the landfill.

What's in a Toward Zero Waste plan?



1. REDUCE



2. REUSE



3. RECYCLE AND COMPOST

It is highly recommended to include TZW as an agenda item at each regular planning meeting. Many event organizers create a committee and/or designate a leader to plan for TZW. At minimum, a TZW plan should include:

A. A list of all waste that will be produced. Create a list of waste and group these items by categories: compost, paper, glass, etc. Make a copy of your final list for the volunteers or staff who will monitor the central waste stations during the event. Note which containers will be needed for your event.

B. Details about a Centralized Waste Stations. The station is a place where event attendees will dispose of all their waste (recycling, composting, and landfill). Include maps noting where the centralized waste stations are located (for large events) and group all receptacles together. For example, if you have receptacles for landfill, recycling, and composting available at an event – attendees should never find a landfill receptacle all by itself. It should always be paired with a recycling and compost receptacle. Take into consideration where food will be served and if wait staff will be bussing tables.

C. Volunteer recruiting and training. Proper training and instruction of your TZW volunteers (or staff) is very important. They have special duties for the day and it is in everyone's best interest to make sure they have all the tools and knowledge necessary to be successful at their station as well as let them know they are appreciated! Visit SustainableConnections.org for additional volunteer considerations.

D. What to do with Leftovers. Consider working with a local food bank or other charity to donate leftovers or determine if volunteers can bring their own containers to take any extra food home. Keep in mind that coolers may be needed to keep leftovers from spoiling.



A. Pre Event Planning

1) Engage all Stakeholders

A successful Toward Zero Waste (TZW) event starts by committing to the whole process - from start to finish. It is imperative all key stakeholders are on board, engaged and each understands their role. These key stakeholders will provide the leadership and guidance necessary to successfully implement your TZW procedures.

Key stakeholders will vary by event:

- Event coordinator or planner
- Volunteer coordinator
- Vendors (and/or caterer)
- Sponsors
- Venue owner/facilities manager
- Business owners

2) Select a Venue

The venue you choose will impact the ease with which you are able to implement TZW procedures at your event. A large outdoor festival will take a lot more planning and require a larger number of staff or volunteers than an event held in a single location like a ballroom. Venues that already operate as TZW are becoming more common and will make hosting a TZW event even easier.

3) Choose Food and Beverage Providers

If you are using a caterer or food trucks, make sure they know you are hosting a TZW event, confirm they understand your requirements, and have them sign your TZW Vendor agreement. If you are providing your own meals or refreshments, choose food with minimal packaging such as sandwich platters or bowls of salad and veggies.

If you are hosting a large event, consider reducing waste by using beverage dispensers, pitchers, or water coolers. Many styles are available to suit your desired theme from casual to formal, and the cost is usually cheaper than serving bottled beverages. Kegs or growlers with reusable cups are the best ways to serve beer in larger quantities. If you decide to offer single serving beverages, aluminum cans are the best choice. They are infinitely recyclable, unbreakable, and have a lower transportation footprint.

For a consistent and steady supply of water at sporting events or for a large number of attendees, check into the Zip 2 Water system. This system connects to a standard garden hose and provides filtered water at a high rate. Locally, Whatcom Events (<http://whatcomevents.org>) loans out their Zip 2 Water system and it is available on a first come first served bases.

4) Purchase Supplies

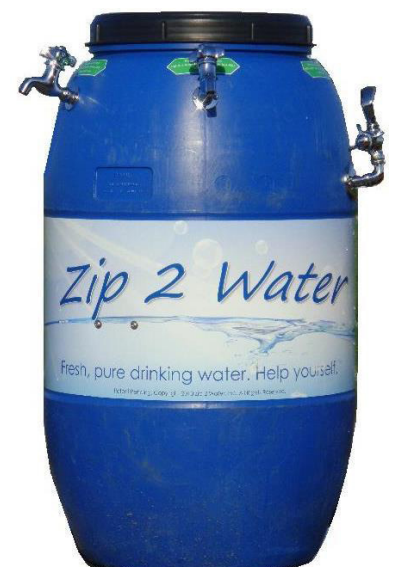
Keep TZW in mind when you are purchasing supplies. Visit SustainableConnections.org for a list of preferred compostable food service items and where to look for them in Whatcom County. If event planners need large quantities of supplies or are planning an event outside of Whatcom County, they can check for supplies online at Cedar Grove (<https://cedar-grove.com>).

Things to consider:

- Purchase or rent reusable items such as napkins, plates, glasses, etc. If you are purchasing items, consider if there is space to wash dishes if needed.
- Use wooden coffee stirrers or metal spoons instead of plastic sticks.
- Provide half-and-half in a pitcher rather than single-serve containers.
- Use pump or bulk jars for condiments.
- Offer sugar in cubes, a bowl, or paper packets (they are compostable).
- Provide beverages in pitchers or dispensers instead of individual bottles.

Things to avoid:

- Bottled water
- Prepackaged foods
- Styrofoam and plastic





5) Secure Receptacles

Does the venue have compost and/or recycling already set up? If so, how many receptacles are on-site and available to use? If you need to order your own:

- Make payment, delivery, and pickup arrangements with a local waste & recycling company for receptacles that you need. Be sure delivery is well before the event set-up begins, which may mean the day before. Be specific about delivery and pickup locations. Check with your local company about how many receptacles you may need, what signage is necessary, and how recyclables need to be separated (or not). When you order receptacles for your event, they will arrive CLEAN. You do not need to line them with bags - just roll them to your centralized waste station(s)!
- Plan to use cardboard or reusable bins/boxes for materials that local companies don't supply receptacles for, and determine what additional support you may need to dispose of those materials. For example, if the venue doesn't recycle film plastic, make arrangements for it to be taken to SSC after the event.

SANITARY SERVICE COMPANY (SSC)

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

NOOKSACK VALLEY DISPOSAL & RECYCLING

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



“When in doubt, throw it out.” Overall, it is better if the occasional item that can be recycled or composted ends up in the landfill bin. It is more important to avoid contamination of the recycling and especially the compost waste streams.

6) Print Signage

Download and print waste receptacle signage from Sustainable Connections at <https://sustainableconnections.org/programs/business-development/toward-zero-waste/>. Consider double-sided signs if the receptacles are accessible from both directions. Also consider customized signs for the bathroom or kitchen areas. Visit SustainableConnections.org to download signage or contact us about borrowing large banners.

If paper towels are provided in restrooms, plan to provide bins to compost them in restrooms. Be sure to provide clear signage saying “PAPER TOWELS ONLY” above the largest receptacle(s) in the bathroom. Make sure to have a smaller (labeled) landfill receptacle next to the paper towel receptacle. There is no need to line the paper towel receptacle with a compostable bag. Paper towels from restrooms are easy to empty into the large compost toters as needed.

7) Communicate Expectations to Vendors

Vendors and exhibitors can make or break your event meeting TZW goals. A single vendor not in compliance with your TZW requirements can create various challenges including waste stream contamination. Clearly communicate to vendors and exhibitors that this will be a TZW event and what items are allowed for food service, demonstrations, sampling etc. All materials should be reusable, recyclable, or compostable. Visit SustainableConnections.org for a list of preferred compostable food service items. Ask all vendors and exhibitors to sign a TZW vendor agreement to reinforce the importance of adhering to the policies. A sample vendor agreement can be found on Sustainable Connections website.

8) Market Your Event!

Include TZW logos on your posters, website and in social media posts. Encourage attendees to bring their own coffee mug, water bottles or durable serving ware!

B. Day of Event

1) Arrive Early

Make sure volunteers understand their roles and who they can contact if they have questions. Ideally, volunteers that are stationed at the receptacles assisting and educating attendees are not afraid to be assertive. Provide each TZW volunteer with the necessary supplies including gloves, extra bags, and tongs. At larger events, provide something that makes the volunteers more recognizable such as safety vests, special t-shirts, aprons, or large buttons.

2) Greet Vendors

Remind vendors about the TZW vendor agreement. In the event they have items that are not in compliance with your agreement, ask them to remove or replace those items with approved and acceptable alternatives. You may want to purchase extra serving ware items to sell to vendors the day of your event, or even build something into the vendor agreement that states you will provide appropriate serving ware for vendors at cost.

3) Set Up

Set up central waste station(s) and attach appropriate signage to each receptacle.

- “Seed” the various receptacles with the “right” waste
- Consider posting TZW signage throughout the event space that identifies where centralized waste stations are located.
- Survey the event throughout the day and adjust as needed. Monitor any cross contamination in the receptacles (including bathrooms).



From large festivals to classy weddings, it is possible to host a Toward Zero Waste event when you plan ahead.



C. Post Event

1. Thank your volunteers!

2. Transfer bathroom compostable paper towels to the compost bin if needed.
3. Debrief your waste goals at the end of the day. Look in the receptacles and determine overall success rates for sorting.
4. Take notes or pictures to remind yourself of what worked and what could be improved.
5. Consider again how to reduce the amount of trash generated.
6. Remove all TZW signs from the venue; store any that could be reused.
7. Return any receptacles that belonged to the venue to their original locations. Remove all signs and tape from these receptacles.
8. Dispose of all waste to appropriate dumpsters if needed. Roll receptacles to the original drop off/pick-up location.
9. Give yourself a high five. You have done good work for the right reasons. Celebrate your success – you deserve it!



Celebrate Success!

**PROMOTE YOUR TZW SUCCESS INTERNALLY AND TO THE PUBLIC!
SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS CAN HELP CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESS WITH
CASE STUDIES AND PUBLIC PROMOTION. CONTACT MARK
(MARK@SUSTAINABLECONNECTIONS.ORG) FOR MORE INFORMATION!**