

# Recycling at Events

A GUIDE TO REDUCING WASTE AT ANY EVENT



An aerial, high-angle photograph of a large, busy trade show floor. The floor is filled with numerous booths of varying sizes, each with its own branding and displays. Many attendees are seen walking through the aisles, interacting at booths, and standing in groups. The lighting is bright, and the overall atmosphere is one of a well-attended professional event. The image has a light green tint.

This guide provides you, the event organizer, a convenient way to successfully plan recycling programs and other green practices for special events. Beginning with pre-event planning, to day-of-event tips, and post-event evaluation, you can take your event beyond just recycling to hosting an environmentally friendly and sustainable event.

# SECTION ONE - PRE-EVENT PLANNING

It is never too early to start the planning process for preventing and recycling waste for your event. Start by reviewing what materials can be collected for recycling in your community, consider barriers to recycling, and evaluate opportunities to prevent waste. Review previous recycling and waste prevention efforts, if applicable.

## ESTABLISH GOALS

**Create a recycling and waste prevention event plan, including:**

- Task list with due dates.
- Maps with receptacle sites and signage locations. (See Section 2 for details.)
- Event coordinator and contact information.
- Volunteer/employee tasks and shifts.

### **Think about waste prevention**

Waste prevention involves thinking about what actions will generate the least amount of waste. Eliminating a waste material means you don't have to collect or recycle it. For example, doing away with the "box" in boxed lunches translates to less garbage. Waste prevention planning can result in significant financial savings and environmental benefits.

## Serving food? Consider:

- 1 Serving buffet style instead of boxed lunches or individually wrapped items
- 2 Planning the menu using local, seasonal produce, include vegetarian options
- 3 Offering organic produce and meats, and fair trade, shade-grown, organic coffee
- 4 Using edible garnishes, or no garnishes
- 5 Asking attendees to sign-up for meals or to let you know what meals they will be eating
- 6 Choosing centerpieces and decorations that can be reused or given away, such as living plants, bowls of fruit or silk flowers

## FOOD

### Plan to donate leftover food.

More than 720,000 Oregonians use the services of food banks each year. And each year, nearly 190,000 tons of food in the Metro region, much of which is edible, are thrown away. Fresh and prepared foods are in demand by food rescue agencies. Metro's Fork-It Over program rescues food and redistributes it to those in need.

### Consider composting food scraps (organics).

Organics often are the largest waste material at events. Increase your recycling rate by composting food scraps, coffee grounds and paper contaminated with food residue.

If your community does not have a food composting program, work with the garbage/recycling hauler to find alternatives, or:

1. At larger events, deliver organics to local farmers, community gardens, or large institutions with existing composting programs.
2. At smaller events, identify volunteers to take away food scraps for their home compost or worm bin.

# VENDORS AND VOLUNTEERS

## Recruit and train volunteers/employees.

Recruit and train as many volunteers as possible: one volunteer per planned recycling station (depending on length of event), at least two volunteers to troubleshoot during the event, and one “recycling coordinator.” The recycling coordinator can:

- recruit and train volunteers
- make signs
- work with vendors and exhibitors before and during the event
- monitor recycling stations
- sort bins for contamination
- communicate recycling information during the event
- transfer recyclables from bins to collection points
- track recycling rates

## Make initial contact with vendors and exhibitors a few months before the event.

Prepare an introductory letter (see Appendix B for samples) to vendors and exhibitors. Introduce the idea of recycling, what items are being targeted and ask for their cooperation. Your event can require that vendors not sell items with certain packaging if you do not want to or cannot collect them. Provide suggested alternatives to common throw-away items.

Determine what types of materials vendors may be using and how you might work together to reduce waste generated at the event. The following tips can help reduce packaging and throw-aways:

- 1 Eliminate packaging (example - use bulk condiments for jams, honey, sugar, catsup and mustard rather than individually packaged servings)
- 2 Buy in bulk
- 3 Use refillable or reusable containers and serving products (example - urns, pitchers or punch bowls rather than canned or bottled products)
- 4 Reuse decorations and props
- 5 Use cloth napkins
- 6 Avoid non-recyclable containers
- 7 Use compostable containers
- 8 Buy supplies with recycled content, such as cups and napkins, or with low environmental impacts, such as non-toxic cleaners

TAKE IT  
ONE STEP  
FURTHER

## SITE LOGISTICS

### Hire a garbage and/or recycling hauler(s).

When hiring a hauler, consider the following: the cost of services, donation of services, the hauler's experience with event recycling, availability of containers (may also be available through cities or counties), hauler's ability to measure and report garbage and recycling data, and the range of materials accepted. Talk to your local government representative for assistance (see page 10).

Outside of the city of Portland, garbage collection service is regulated by the local government which franchises the authorized collection companies by area. Check with the local solid waste office for the name of the franchised collection company and for a list of additional companies which may be permitted to provide recycling services.

### Establish a relationship with the event coordinator, site supervisor and/or janitorial staff.

Your venue's staff can make or break your recycling program. Make sure that all parties understand and will carry out your plans, especially if they are doing the recycling themselves.

## PUBLICITY

### Publicize the recycling message.

Integrate the recycling/waste prevention message into all event materials and press releases.

- 1 Seek out sites and partners that share your environmental goals
- 2 When selecting a site, ask each site being considered to complete a checklist to rate their environmental practices and performance (look for ways they conserve energy and water, use earth-friendly products, utilize green building practices, participate in fair workplace practices, and support the community)
- 3 Power your event with green power (example – the Bite of Oregon bought green power to offset its energy use during the event)
- 4 If your event is outdoors, look for sites that use alternatives to pesticides/herbicides for pest control and no or minimum irrigation of lawns
- 5 Choose sites that are accessible by public transit and are bike-friendly; if car and air travel are necessary, offset CO2 emissions by purchasing carbon dioxide credits ([www.climatetrust.org](http://www.climatetrust.org)); offer a discount or special prize drawing for those who arrive by alternative transportation

# SECTION TWO - DURING EVENT

## SET-UP

Set up recycling receptacles and stations the day before the event, if possible.

### Maximize collection and reduce contamination of recyclables.

Collect cleaner recyclables with strategic placement of signs and receptacles:

1. Place recycling/composting and trash receptacles together.
2. Recycling stations should be highly visible. (e.g., a flag on a tall pole, balloons, signs, etc.) and in convenient locations.
3. Limit the number of recycling/waste stations to allow for ease of monitoring. Place larger stations in areas where high volumes of waste will be generated.
4. Label recycling and garbage receptacles with clear, large and specific wording. Signage should be placed at eye level. If feasible, attach a physical sample of the acceptable material to its container.
5. Use recycling bins that are visually different from other waste receptacles.
6. Use clear plastic bags as liners for recycling bins for easy identification and removal of contaminants. Use opaque black bags in garbage bins.
7. Staff all recycling stations at all times. If this is not possible, then assign a “floater” to check each area periodically.

### Greet vendors and exhibitors during set-up.

Provide clear instructions on how to recycle at the event and who to contact (the recycling coordinator) if they have questions.

Promote recycling/waste prevention using signs or banners at entrance and registration areas, signs on garbage and recycling receptacles, statements in programs, and public address announcements.



An example of a recycling receptacle.

# RECYCLE!

**Designate a central collection area for garbage and recycling, where drop boxes or dumpsters are staged.**

This area can serve as a place for recycling volunteers to check in, sort materials if needed, and observe the material flow. Station someone here throughout the event.

**Recycling volunteers should be easy to identify, e.g., by a hat, vest, T-shirt, apron, etc.**

Use walkie-talkies to communicate with the recycling coordinator, key volunteers and event organizers at large events.

**Use hand trucks, carts or “gators” (mini-trucks) to transport material from the recycling stations to the central collection area.**



Komen Portland Race for the Cure® recycling volunteers.

# POST-EVENT

**Tear down and clean up.**

Materials continue to be generated during clean up. Assist vendors with tear down. Complete and/or confirm final sorting and pick-up of garbage and recycling. Donate food.



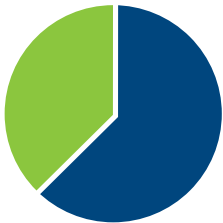
# SECTION THREE - EVALUATION

## Evaluate Your Event's Success

Ask for feedback and suggestions from everyone involved in the event including organizers, volunteers, vendors, exhibitors and haulers.

Follow up with the hauler/recycler for final weights on the amount of collected recyclables and garbage.

Calculate your recycling rate using the following formula:  
Recycling rate = Amount recycled / (Amount recycled + Amount Disposed).



For example, if an event recycled 5,000 pounds of material and disposed of 3,000 pounds of material, the recycling rate would be 62.5% ( $5,000 / (5,000 + 3,000) = 62.5\%$ ).

Publicize the recycling rate along with the results of waste prevention efforts.

Thank your donors, sponsors and volunteers with a card or a post event celebration, and share the recycling rates and waste prevention results with them.

TAKE IT  
ONE STEP  
FURTHER

**Audit your event's total environmental performance and impact. In addition to tracking the materials recycled, monitor water and energy usage and the number of attendees who traveled by alternative transportation. Use this audit in future years to monitor your progress and successes. See Appendix C for sample from Portland's BEST Awards Breakfast.**

# APPENDIX A - RESOURCES

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Located in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area unless otherwise noted.

## **Bio Technology Inc.**

[www.thinkbti.com](http://www.thinkbti.com)

Nebraska manufacturer of compostable wheat and corn based tableware.

## **Earthshell**

410-847-9420 or [www.earthshell.com](http://www.earthshell.com)

California manufacturer of compostable hinged-lid clamshells, plates, bowls and sandwich wraps.

## **Hands on Portland**

503-413-7787 or [www.handsonportland.org](http://www.handsonportland.org)

Partners with nonprofit groups at no cost to provide volunteers for events or ongoing needs.

## **Local Government Representatives**

- Clackamas County 503-353-4455
- City of Beaverton 503-526-2665
- City of Portland, Office of Sustainable Development 503-823-7202
- City of Troutdale 503-665-5175
- City of Milwaukie 503-786-7508
- City of Gresham and Wood Village 503-618-2656
- City of Fairview 503-674-6230
- Washington County 503-846-8609

## **Master Recycler Program**

503-823-7530 or [www.masterrecycler.org](http://www.masterrecycler.org)

A region-wide program that offers training and outreach on waste prevention and recycling to Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington County residents.

## **Metro's Fork-It Over Program**

503-234-3000 or [www.forkitover.com](http://www.forkitover.com)

Free food donation assistance.

## **Metro Recycling Information Hotline**

503-234-3000 or [www.metro-region.org/recycling](http://www.metro-region.org/recycling)

Find a recycler for a material, request the "Resource Guide for Food Donation" or review "Waste Prevention and Recycling at Conferences and Meetings" guide.

## **Nat-ur, Inc**

310-491-3465 or [www.nat-ur.com](http://www.nat-ur.com)

California company that sells compostable plates, cups, cutlery, garbage and recycling bags.

## **Office of Sustainable Development's Event Recycling Program**

503-725-8448

Provides free event recycling assistance, containers and signage, within the city of Portland.

## **Recycling Advocates**

503-777-0909 or [www.recyclingadvocates.org](http://www.recyclingadvocates.org)

Oregon's only citizen-based, grassroots group dedicated to creating a sustainable future through local efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle. Provides consultation to events incorporating recycling and waste reduction.

## **S.C.R.A.P.**

503-294-0769 or [www.scrapaction.org](http://www.scrapaction.org)

Reclaims used materials and scraps for creative reuse (low cost artistic and educational items for sale).

# APPENDIX B - SAMPLE VENDOR LETTERS

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## Sample 1

### A GENERAL LETTER TO VENDORS

The [name of event] is counting on you to help make this year's [event] another huge success. You can do so not only by your generous sponsorship, but also by recycling the material you generate at your booth. Events at [event site] generate a large amount of waste, and the organizing committee is committed to minimizing the amount going into landfills. We ask that you support our efforts to be an environmentally sensitive event.

Please review the waste management procedures below and complete the On-Site Needs and Plan Form. Return the form to [event coordinator] by [date].

[List any specific waste management procedures, such as materials to be recycled, vendor responsibilities, etc.]

#### **On-Site Needs and Plan Form**

Please return to [event coordinator] by [date].

Vendor Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please describe any items you plan to distribute at your booth:

Will your booth operations or items you give away generate any packaging/garbage (plastic wrappers, foil bottle caps, etc.)? Please describe so that we can be prepared:

Please describe any needs you have on the day of the event (power, tables, chairs, etc.):

What else do you plan to do/have at your booth? Describe anything else you plan to bring (prizewheels, inflatables, vehicles, etc.):

[Name(s)] at [phone number] will be your contact for booth set-up and on-site logistical needs.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP in making the [event] a great event. See you on [date].

# APPENDIX B - SAMPLE VENDOR LETTERS

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## Sample 2

### THE BITE OF OREGON'S LETTER TO VENDORS, 2004.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL GUIDELINES

##### A COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

In Oregon, we care not only about what we produce but how we produce it. With a long history as a conscientious recycler, The Bite recommits itself this year to environmental sensitivity with the long-term goal of becoming the most sustainable festival in the nation.

- Thanks to the generous support of Portland General Electric, The 2004 Bite of Oregon is to be powered completely by renewable energy sources: wind, hydro- and geothermal power. Thank you, PGE.
- By 2008, we aim to make the festival waste-free. We begin our zero-waste campaign this year by asking you to let us know what materials you'll be bringing on site so we may better plan our waste reduction strategies for both this year and next. We'll be performing random waste sampling and weighing all types of waste. Finally, we ask that you avoid certain types of materials as much as possible.

We count on you to make this year's Bite of Oregon a huge success. You can do so not only by your participation, but also by recycling the material you generate at your booth. Events like The Bite generate huge quantities of waste, and we expect you to support our efforts to be an environmentally sensitive event.

##### WASTE DISPOSAL GUIDELINES

Please review the following waste disposal guidelines, complete the On-Site Needs and Plan Form, and sign below, indicating your agreement.

- The Bite relies principally on Green Team volunteer staff to remove waste from your booth. One will visit your booth occasionally to assist you in managing your waste.
- Plan to separate and contain recyclables inside or behind your booth between pick-ups:
  - + Cardboard: flatten and stack
  - + Cans: flatten
  - + Mixed paper
  - + Plastic bottles: flatten
  - + Juice boxes: flatten
  - + Plastic bags

##### MATERIALS TO BE AVOIDED

Some materials are either prohibited or strongly discouraged.

- The use of expanded polystyrene food containers (an example is clamshells) is prohibited in the city of Portland.

# APPENDIX B - SAMPLE VENDOR LETTERS

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- Paper or plastic? Each has its environmental pros and cons and the jury is still out on this knotty question. But where you have options, choose recyclable, reusable paper materials (preferably unbleached kraft paper) over petroleum-based, non-biodegradable plastics (especially prolific and persistent, plastic film bags and plastic butter/margarine tubs).
- Avoid multi-material containers. Containers like those typically used in packaging grated cheese and frozen juices can have paper, foil, metal and plastic all in one container. These are impossible to reuse or recycle and go straight to the landfill.

## COMING ATTRACTIONS

In the future, watch for these improvements in waste reduction.

- The development of biodegradable serviceware (plates, cups, utensils) proceeds apace. As these become more aesthetic, market-ready and cost-competitive, The Bite will move toward standardization of biodegradable serviceware at the festival.
- Metro is working on a food composting system that we hope to be in place by 2005, designed mainly with the restaurant industry in mind. This will permit the unsorted collection of all biodegradable waste: animal fats, unbleached paper, biodegradable serviceware, etc., without the need for sorting.

## ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT FORM

Please complete the following and mail, fax or deliver the completed form to us. [ Fax number ]

NAME OF BOOTH \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT PERSON: \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

FAX: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list or describe the materials that you will be dispensing as part of your food, beverage, performance or promotional activities (e.g., paper plates, plastic forks, napkins, plastic glasses, glass bottles, glossy brochures, etc.).

Please list or describe any packaging materials you will be discarding (e.g., food waste, plastic wrappers, foil, bottle caps, corks, glass or plastic bottles, etc.).

Approximately how many miles will you be driving to operate at the Bite?

What type(s) of vehicles?

How many trips?

# APPENDIX C - SAMPLE EVENT AUDIT

## GREENING THE BEST AWARDS BREAKFAST

The awards breakfast itself was designed to reflect the principles of the event, with strong green practices infused in all aspects of planning.

The Oregon Convention Center (OCC) was selected to host the Awards breakfast based on accessibility, price, and commitment to green practices. Event planners worked with OCC and Aramark (catering) staff to ensure that most of the food was sourced locally and the remainder was organic. The event featured a host of other “green” features:

- Friends of Trees planted a commemorative native tree in honor of each BEST award winner.
- Plant Native provided native plant centerpieces.
- Tri-Met provided free passes for all guests to encourage use of alternative transportation.
- Other sponsors provided sustainably-produced door prizes for guests.
- Guests had the opportunity to enter a drawing and offset carbon impacts with a donation to the Climate Trust.
- Doubletree Lloyd Center provided accommodations for keynote speaker Richard Heinberg. The hotel emphasizes water and energy conservation in hospitality practices.
- Event organizers and volunteers minimized automobile travel and resource use in the planning of the BEST Awards Breakfast.
- All printed materials for the event were produced on post-consumer recycled paper.

	Cardboard Recycled	Plastic Recycled	Scrap Paper Recycled	Food Waste Composted	Total Recovery Rate	Locally Grown Food Served	Organic Food Served	Attendees Who Traveled by Alternative* Transportation	Energy Supplied by Green Power
<b>2004 Actual</b>	100%	100%	100%	25%	63%	27%	66%	56%	25%
<b>2005 Goal</b>	100%	100%	100%	50%	90%	50%	75%	80%	100%

\* bicycle, public transit, carpool, walk

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**PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION BY:**



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Recycling Advocates, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, authored the original edition of this guide in 1998, and a second edition in 2001.

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper processed chlorine-free with soy-based inks.