



Waste Management Guidelines for Events

Resources from the Convention Industry Council



This is one of those issues that affects all aspects of the triple bottom line: people, planet and prosperity. Fortunately, there are some easy steps to follow that can have a big impact on our performance in this area. Here are some guidelines to help reduce and manage event waste:

1. **Use less:** The first step in reducing waste is to start by using less. When making your purchasing decisions, select only items that are needed to drive event objectives. Maybe this seems obvious, but too often we buy items for our events because we've always bought them.
2. **Use the best option:** When you've made the decision to buy, select the best option for upstream and downstream waste management. From an upstream perspective, look for items made from post-consumer or upcycled materials. From a downstream perspective, look for items with less packaging that can be donated, recycled or repurposed after the event. Alternatively, consider whether or not that item can be substituted with a no-waste alternative, such as an app instead of a printed programme. Ever wondered about the difference between upcycling and recycling? Upcycling results in new products, while recycling results in materials. Using banners to make tote bags is an example of upcycling.
3. **Life-cycle planning:** Some industries have extended producer responsibility legislation, what the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines as an environmental policy approach in which a producer's responsibility for a product is extended to the post-consumer stage of a product's life cycle.¹ Let's imagine for a moment what would happen if event producers became responsible for the take-back, recycling and final disposal of their products at a recovery rate of 75 percent. How would that change our planning processes? I encourage you to apply a reverse logistics approach to your event, and use the same skill set that we have honed for getting materials onsite, to getting them back into the economy.
4. **Reuse, donate or upcycle:** A great way to reduce waste is to keep items for reuse. Items such as signs that are printed without date or locations can be stored for future years. Other great options are to look at donating items to charitable organizations or upcycling items into new products. Upcycling turns leftover items into new products, while recycling turns them into materials to make new products. As an example, vinyl signs can be upcycled into tote bags, while cardboard signs can be recycled into pulp. I also encourage you to ask your supply chain to do the same, especially with items such as partially used batteries from wireless mics.
5. **Recycle or compost:** Finally, for items that can't be reused, donated or upcycled, opt for recycling or composting. One tip: check with your venue and destination in advance to confirm what can be recycled or composted locally. Not all cities recycle all types of plastics, and not all composters can process items such as compostable cups. Finding this out in advance will help you to make the best choices for your event.

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¹ OECD, Extended Producer Responsibility <http://www.oecd.org/env/tools-evaluation/extendedproducerresponsibility.htm>