

ZERO WASTE EVENTS GUIDE

INTRODUCTION - Making Zero Waste Easy

Zero waste events are a great way to show your commitment to the environment while creating a model of zero waste for your guests. The key to a zero waste event is careful planning so all materials used and disposed of are reusable, recyclable, or compostable. By thinking ahead about the materials your guests will be using and disposing of, it's easy to plan waste out of the event.

Vermont's Universal Recycling Law (Act 148) bans recyclables, food scraps and leaf and yard waste from the landfill. The ban on recyclables has been in place since July 1, 2015. And by July 1, 2020, food scraps are banned from the landfill. Now is the time to reimagine how to manage waste at your event, both to comply with Vermont law and to offer an added benefit to your participants.

Zero waste event planning can apply to all types of events, of all sorts and sizes. From a block party to a large festival or wedding, reducing waste follows the same basic principles. Each opportunity to hold a zero waste event makes a difference both for the environment and by showing others that this is achievable.

Use this guide to help you plan your event: Not all options will apply to your event—Pick and choose the ones that are right for you.

What is “zero waste”?

“Zero Waste is a goal that is ethical, economical, efficient and visionary, to guide people in changing their lifestyles and practices to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use.” - Zero Waste International Alliance

Why zero waste?

- Nearly half of all U.S. landfills are full or have been closed because of groundwater contamination.
- At the pace we are tossing trash, we'll fill up Vermont's only permitted landfill in a matter of years. But siting a new landfill is not sustainable due to pollution (methane emissions, other greenhouse gas leaks, groundwater pollution, etc.), high landfill siting and maintenance costs, and the fact that most people don't want a landfill in their backyard.
- To achieve a sustainable system of managing our finite resources, communities must incorporate nature's law, waste = food, and channel materials into reuse and new production.
- The linear model of consumerism (extracting virgin resources for products and packaging, then discarding these resources to landfills or incinerators) is a primary cause of global resource depletion and associated



environmental, climate, and social problems. Zero waste is an integral part of a circular economy, where everything is treated as a resource.

Pre-Event Planning:

Section 1 - The Sorting Station

Types of Sorting Stations:

Every event will need a bin for food scraps, recyclables and landfill at the very least. Ideally, the sorting stations will be monitored by trained volunteers or staff. To cut down further on waste during your event, **stay in touch with your vendors** (or caterer). Learn about each disposable cup/plate/spoon/bowl/napkin that will be used by vendors for serving... Each station will need collection bins based on the items you are collecting, but start by encouraging vendors to serve foods that don't require disposables by using toothpicks or napkins, for example, instead of plates or disposable flatware.

- **Recyclables**—> Clean and free of food debris. Set up rinse station to aid in this process. A separate station can be set up if your event is collecting bottles and cans to return or for charity donation.
- **Food Scraps**—> Check with your hauler to know what is accepted based on the food scraps final destination.
- **Landfill** —> What remains and cannot be reused, recycled, or composted.
- **Reusable** —> bus bins or washing station
- **Liquids** —> In Central Vermont, liquids can go directly into compost (with food scraps).

Sorting Bins: Bins and cans should be color-coded to indicate what goes in each bin. For example: all compost bins green, recycling bins blue, and landfill bins black, etc.

Where to get sorting bins? CVSWMD loans out sorting station along with signage, free, for your one-time event.

[Click Here](#) for our online reservation form. [Or for PRINT version: Reserve bins for your Zero Waste Event today! Call the CVSWMD office at 802-229-9383 to get started. This program is for events taking place within the CVSWMD member towns only.]¹

For large – or annually repeating – events, we recommend purchasing sort station bins at one of these suppliers:

¹ Barre City, Barre Town, Berlin, Bradford, Calais, Chelsea, Duxbury, East Montpelier, Fairlee, Hardwick, Middlesex, Montpelier, Orange, Plainfield, Tunbridge, Walden, Washington, Williamstown and Woodbury. Member towns may change, go to 802recycles.com to see which solid waste district your town belongs to.



- [ReCycle Away](#) – Brattleboro, VT 800-664-5340
- [Clear Stream](#)—Palos Heights, IL 855-411-4321

Consistency is KEY. It is important that every sorting station at your event looks the same to avoid confusion for your event guests. Same bins, same order at every location.

Number of Stations: Use this **simple formula for smaller events**—> **1 Zero Waste Station/25 guests.** For larger events contact your local [hauler](#). Go to cvswmd.org/hauler-information for a list of central Vermont licensed haulers.

Recyclables: These can go in CLEAR bags, but the recyclables should be dumped OUT of the bag when transferred to your roll off or larger collection container during the event. In Vermont, bagged recyclables, particularly if not in clear bags, cause problems at the sorting facility where most recyclables in the CVSWMD end up. To recycle properly, empty recyclables out of collection bags when they go into your large roll-off provided by your hauler. If you don't un-bag recyclables they might end up in the landfill.

Food Scraps: If composting locally, do not use “bio” bags or “compostable” bags for collecting food scraps. The large-scale composters in our region do not accept materials in bags of any form. Instead, food scraps go directly into the designated bin – WITH NO BAG – and your food scrap hauler will pick up the bins. If you are using CVSWMD free sorting stations for your event, you'll need to drop off your food scraps, and return the bins after cleaning them with a hot water hose and scrub brush.

Landfill: Anything headed for the landfill should go in a black trash bag to differentiate it from the clear recyclables bags. This will make it more likely that your volunteers and staff will get the materials that everyone worked so hard to sort into the correct place at the end of the event. It also makes it clear which bags should be dumped OUT—the clear ones, and which go in the trash—the black ones.

Signs: Clear signs, featuring images or even displayed items that are found at your event, help guests quickly and correctly sort their items.

- **Clear wording:** Use as few words as possible, such as: RECYCLING, COMPOST, LANDFILL.
- **Placement:** Be sure signs are at eye level and easy to see from a distance.
- **Photos and Images:** Use colors corresponding to bin color and images of what you want to go in the bins. OR staple or Velcro ACTUAL containers to the sign
- **Display:** Use a corkboard, poster board or plexi-glass case to display waste items found at the event. For example, napkins, hot liquid cups, soda bottles, french-fry trays, etc.
- **Reusable:** Reuse your signs at other events. Plain paper signs will get damaged or fall off when wet, so consider using a heavy duty material for your signs, or laminate them if you know you'll be reusing. Establish a plan to collect signs at the end of the event, clean them if needed and store them for the next event.

DID YOU KNOW? We have downloadable/printable signs on our [website](#)!

Supplies You Will Need:



- Gloves
- Tape - heavy duty for taping materials and signs to bins or sticky Velcro
- Hand held grabber tool(s) for station monitors and/or volunteers to remove contamination from bins.
- Pens/markers (bring extra, these can disappear)
- Clipboards
- Volunteer identification items (e.g. name tags/lanyards, buttons, t-shirts, vests, etc)
- Scale(s) for weighing waste (or system of measuring amount of waste/recycling/compost) – this is optional, but recommended to keep track of how much waste you are reducing!
- Measuring sheets/templates

Mapping: Once you know the number of sorting stations, it is time to map out their locations within the venue.

Sorting stations need to be set up in key locations throughout your event venue, such as by entrances, exits, and eating areas. This will help you figure out the number of volunteers/staff you'll want to have. Maps can also be given to volunteers to help them orient and show up in the right place on time.

Variables to consider:

- Where are the current landfill bins located? You might consider having a station wherever there are currently landfill bins – if they are not movable, and depending on how many. (Consider also that you don't want more sorting stations than you have volunteers to monitor).
- Consider keeping the stations where people are used to finding landfill bins at previous events. Be consistent year to year to develop habits in event attendees.
- What is the layout of the venue? Typical sorting station locations might include: where food and beverages are being served and consumed, bathrooms, and along heavy traffic flows.
- Having a large event doesn't necessarily mean more stations, but it might mean more bins at EACH station. Fewer stations require fewer volunteers. More stations = more bins for staff/volunteers to monitor and empty.

Section 2 – Planning downstream

What happens to each stream post-event? Pre-event planning includes identifying what happens to the sorted resources after the event. Before the event, you should identify who will pick up each stream, how often they will be collected, and where they will be taken and stored during the event. **Note that there may be different arrangements made for each waste stream.**

Recycling: Make sure that if recycling is collected in plastic bags, that they are taken out of the bags and dumped into a larger receptacle at the end of the event. **Haulers will not accept recycling in plastic bags.**

The following items are mandated recyclables in the CVSWMD:

- Plastic - #1-6, larger than 2" on any 2 sides
- Metal - Aluminum, clean tin foil larger than 2" balled, steel, cans



- Glass - all colors
- Paper - cardboard, office paper, box board, etc.

All recyclables MUST be free of grease and food debris. Set up rinsing station(s) for ensuring clean recyclables.

Food Scraps: For large events in our district Black Dirt Farm, Cookeville Compost, Vermont Compost, and Grow Compost may accept your food scraps. You will need to set up a contract with a food scrap hauler well before the event is scheduled. See a complete list of food scrap haulers in Vermont [here](#).

For smaller events, options include:

- Work with a local pig or chicken farmer to collect your food scraps afterward. If you do this, be aware of Vermont's [Swine Feed Laws](#); no meat or food scraps contaminated with meat may be fed to swine. If feeding to pigs, meat must be kept separate from other food scraps. There is no such policy for feeding food scraps to chickens.
- Looking for someone involved in the event planning who might take your food scraps for composting at their residence or farm. Put out a call amongst the group.
- For less than 48 gallons of food scraps, you can drive them in covered 5-gallon buckets to any of the compost facilities listed above for a free drop off. Just make sure they are contaminant free (no non-organic matter, no paper, no plastic) and call the facility ahead. Also, all transfer stations in Vermont will accept food scrap drop off, for a fee.

Waste Oil: Will you collect waste oil or require that food vendors recycle their own? If small amounts, it can be included with your food scraps. Larger amounts can be collected separately either through Grow Compost, or Black Bear Biodiesel. You will need to arrange for waste oil collection well before your scheduled event, and educate vendors about how to do it.

Landfill: Any non-recyclable containers, soiled paper plates, containers with food debris, non-compostable items, disposable "compostable" dishware, and other trash.

Choose a Hauler:

Know who is hauling the different event waste streams and when they will be picking up the materials. If your event is during the weekend or not on the usual day for hauler pick-up, you will need to either hold the waste until a regular pick-up day or make special arrangements.

- Choose your hauler:** Find an [updated list of haulers](#) by region on our website cvswmd.org/licensed-hauler-list
- Connect in advance:** Reserve the date, check in about specifics (what is accepted and not), when they will pick up, etc.

Options for smaller events:



If you are planning a smaller event (300 people or less) and you don't want to hire a hauler - you can still find out where to take your streams after the event, by [finding a transfer station](#) drop-off location on our website:

cvswmd.org/transfer-stations. Other ideas for smaller events:

- Is there someone involved in your organizing team or staff/volunteer that would be willing to haul each stream to its end point?
- Is there a local farmer or homesteader who would want to take your food scraps?
- **Recycling:** Make sure that if you plan to haul your own streams that you understand where to take the recycling and what specifics you need to know about sorting or other preparation. **Know: All recycling must be emptied from plastic bags before bringing to end site.**

Section 3 – Working with staff & volunteers

Staff & volunteers play a key role in the success of a zero waste event. Contamination happens easily: all it takes is one person to put any item in the wrong bin. This visual sends the wrong message to attendees - that “like goes with like” - and people will likely follow suit and make it worse until everything ends up in the trash because it's so contaminated. But you can stop it before it begins, with: great signage, color coded bins, clearly marked bins; use of symbols and images instead of text, trained volunteers and staff who regularly monitor the sorting stations.

Prevent Contamination!

Contamination refers to any item that is found in a bin where it doesn't belong. For example, a plastic fork in a food scrap bin is considered contamination, just as a dirty paper plate in a recycling bin is contamination. Each Sorting Station must feature a trained volunteer who helps attendees by both educating and ensuring that there is no contamination between the bins. Your volunteer isn't just a trash watcher; she or he is doing vital work, increasing public awareness. Your team of volunteers could include:

- Local student groups or sports teams
- Local businesses
- Community Groups or Like-minded organizations

Recruiting Volunteers:

Step 1) Determine how many volunteers you need, use your map, and identify where and when (pre-event, during, and post-event) people need to be assigned. Add volunteer placements to the map if possible.

Step 2) Recruit Staff/Volunteers. No later than four weeks before your training date, reach out to community groups or local businesses. Use social media newspaper ads (including free local listings), your email lists and web pages, and Front Porch Forum.

Step 3) Train and Schedule. Follow up with interested individuals, get commitment. Let them know when and how long they will be required to work, and what will be provided to them as a thank you (free ticket, snacks, t-shirt, training, etc). Set-up a training date for all volunteers to go over your venue map, schedule shifts and delegate roles, and work out all the details of your event with your team.



Staff & Volunteer Roles:

- Sorting station monitor: Assign volunteer roles in 2 hour time slots.
- Set-up and take-down of sorting stations.
- During Event: gathering and sorting materials during the event
- Post-Event: consolidate materials to be made ready for haulers
 - Collect and consolidate signage and bins

By recruiting and training as many volunteers as possible, you will have a “Zero Waste Team” available to assign to various tasks.

IMPORTANT NOTE: make sure at least one member of your event organizing team participates in the waste sorting process. You will need an institutional memory, trained staff and organizers to continue this effort into the future. That person can move from station to station during the event to check-in with volunteers, answer questions and make sure sorting is being done correctly.

Zero Waste Leader:

In addition to your team of staff & volunteers, you should assign a “Zero Waste Leader.” The Zero Waste Leader trains staff & volunteers, oversees all activity related to your zero waste event, and should have a complete set of event information (on a clipboard) 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.

Staff & Volunteers:

The difference between "staff" and "volunteers," is that you might have a budget for paid staff that are required to be there for the entire event. Volunteers however could sign up for a 2-3-hour shift, and then go enjoy the rest of the event as a thank you for their time. Using volunteers enables you to have more hands on deck for a smoothly run event. It also creates an opportunity to educate and spread awareness about recycling and composting.

Volunteers need to be trained to know how to staff sorting stations. In addition to answering basic sorting questions, volunteers may be asked other questions about zero waste.

- Determine how much training will be needed. Based on the size of the event and number of volunteers, you may want to have the training before the event, rather than day-of.
- Provide trainees with information, such as a 1-page “cheat sheet” with talking points.
- Develop training that will enable volunteers to engage attendees with recycling or composting questions.
- Provide staff & volunteers with an identifying item such as a zero waste button, shirt, hat, etc., and, if needed, a venue map showing their assigned sorting station.

Training:



Staff and volunteers need to be on board with your zero waste program, and know their roles. The training should include information about:

- general requirements for recycling at events
- what materials can (and cannot) be recycled (or composted). Providing physical examples of the types of things they will see at the event will be MOST helpful
- positive ways to help attendees and vendors get discarded materials into the correct bin
- where sorted materials belong and how they need to be treated
- a pocket quick guide to use as a reference if they forget
- what the volunteer schedule is on the day of the event, where they are expected to be and at what time
- contact information for the event day in case they are unable to attend, will be late or anything unexpected arises

Section 4 – Working with food vendors

Whether your event will host food vendors, if you'll be using a caterer or preparing food yourself, you need to gather basic information about what your waste streams will look like.

- Will/or Can there be reusable service-ware options? [Go to our website](#) to consider how you can host an event using only reusable service-ware.
- Are there containers for food and drinks? Are there many different kinds? Know what types of disposable items will be used (or require only certain types of your vendors). Get to know which ones are recyclable and which ones are trash, and remember to educate your vendors about compostable service ware, which becomes trash if used in an area where there is no commercial scale composter to accept it.
- What other give-a-ways will vendors be handing out? Anticipate the litter that may generate.

Food Vendor Guidelines

Please refer to our sample vendor letter for tips on communicating your requirements to vendors.

- 1. Require vendors to recycle used cooking oil**
- 2. Require or strongly encourage vendors or caterers provide drinks and condiments (water, tea, sugars, ketchup, salad dressings, etc.) in bulk instead of in individual packages and servings.**
- 3. Provide vendors with a compost bucket and information both in writing and in a spoken conversation about how your food scrap collection will work, or ask them to be responsible for their own food scraps.** Remember, by 2020, food scraps are banned from the trash in Vermont, so most of your vendors will already be familiar with how this works.



4. **Provide List of acceptable items:** Provide vendors with a list of acceptable/ not acceptable items. This will help prevent unwanted items showing up day of the event. *Option: Ask or require your vendors to all use the same containers to avoid confusion.*
5. **Have vendors sign an agreement** to follow your guidelines that contains all the above suggestions. Consider tying compliance with these guidelines to deposit returns for vendors, or adding a small amount to your usual vendor fee for those vendors who refuse to comply.²

Acceptable items:

- **FOOD SCRAPS:** all food scraps including, meat, dairy, eggshells, bread, and all vegetable waste.
- **RECYCLING:** Single sort (everything in one bin) recyclables: rigid plastics, all paper, cardboard, glass bottles, aluminum, and steel

NOT Accepted:

- Compostable food containers
- Food soiled paper products
- Plastic utensils
- Styrofoam
- Plastic bags and other plastic films
- Milk containers, juice packs, straws, etc.

Section 5 – Using Reuseables: Sourcing local service-ware for smaller events

If your event will have few than 300 – 400 participants, use catering supply companies or locally source reusable items for serving and eating food, such as tablecloths, silverware, glasses, mugs, plates and cloth napkins that can be washed and reused. If reuseables aren't an option for the caterer or vendor that you select, **use only recyclable materials, even if you have to landfill your disposables. REMEMBER: compostable dishware and flat ware is not currently accepted at any Central Vermont commercial composting company.**³

Catering Services:

If you are working with a catering company, ask them to provide only washable/reuseable containers. Most catering companies are willing and able to comply with requests to compost food scraps, use reusable containers, and limit the amount of waste, when requested.

D.I.Y Food Service/ Bringing in Reuseables:

² *See Appendix Sample Vendor Letter.

³ Check out www.cvswwd.org "Local Resources" page for places in Central Vermont you can source your events needs.



Bring in your own food and service-ware! Here's how you can source your own service-ware such as tablecloths, silverware, glasses, mugs, plates and cloth napkins.

1. Use a local catering supply company for service-ware.
2. Find service-ware at thrift stores, tag sales, or your grandma's attic!
3. If you sew or know someone who does, make your own napkins.
4. Host at a local venue that has in-house kitchen and/or service-ware.
5. Outdoor event? Set up a simple 3-bin dishwashing station and recruit volunteers to help with washing.
6. [Learn more about local resources for hosting a zero waste event on our website.](#)

If reuseables aren't an option for the caterer or vendor that you select, use only recyclable materials that get rinsed, as compostable products are not currently accepted at any central Vermont commercial composting facility.

Closing Loops: What's leftover, carry it forward

- **Leftover food:** Encourage attendees to bring leftover food home using reusable containers. Research opportunities, in advance of the event, to donate untouched, unopened food to local food shelters, food pantries, or churches. Generally, food banks in Vermont may be willing to collect perishable, prepared food that they will then immediately deliver to a food pantry, soup kitchen, or shelter that can incorporate the donation into the food distribution program. Consider donating to the [Vermont Foodbank](#). Contact the Food Bank in advance to make sure arrangements are made for the event day(s).
- **Store extra supplies:** Share what you've learned, and, if this event was a one-time only event, pass on things like sorting station materials, reuseables, or donate to a local school, church or reuse store.

Section 6 – Other areas to think about

Decorations and give-a-ways

Consider the environmental impact of any raffled prizes, give-a-ways, centerpieces or decorations to be used at the event, and minimizing the packaging for such items. Use natural materials for decorations that can be composted after the event.

- Limit the number of give-a-ways
- Consider give-a-ways of experiences instead of stuff. Like a gift certificate for a meal or tickets to see music.
- Make sure all items purchased are reusable, recyclable, or compostable (food items).
- Allow participants to select only the items they actually want (rather than handing them out to everyone). This will avoid unwanted items finding their way to the trash bin.
- Distribute items to attendees that will help them to reduce waste (e.g cloth bags, native plant seeds, potted plants, etc).

Measuring success

It may be valuable to be able to report the success of your waste diversion. The question is what information may be useful for future organizers, your board for fundraising, or public for marketing? Here's some things to think about as



you decide the methods you will use. However you decide to look at your results, having some measure of success is a good idea.

- **Determine measuring method.** Will you assess the actual weight of amount diverted from landfill, or will you choose a more simple way of evaluating (# of bags of trash vs. last year's #).
- **Make preparations for collecting data.** How will you collect data during your event? Create a form for volunteers/staff to record values of waste collection. **Such as:** by weight (provide scale), by volume (of known containers or a marked line on dumpster), or even number of bags. Think about what information you want to take out of the event, and communicate this to volunteers and staff.

Human waste... What about bathrooms?

Something you may need to consider as a part of your events' waste stream is human waste. Where will people go to the bathroom? Will there be on-site facilities that will cover your attendee capacity? There are local options for renting portable toilets that can be a simple solution.

- [Calkins Portable Toilets](#) – Montpelier, VT
- [Luxury Event Restrooms](#) – Charlotte, VT

Ready to take zero waste ideas into the bathroom?? Here are some other ideas and practices you could research of ways to reduce human waste at your event:

- Check out the [Humanure Handbook](#), by Joseph Jenkins to learn everything you need to know from building your own to maintaining a composting toilet.
- [EPA's Fact Sheet on Composting Toilets.](#)
- [Rich Earth Institute](#) has great info on their website about urine diversion. They may even come collect for your event!
- [Learn more about this](#) topic on our website!

Section 7 – Marketing, Publicity, and Invitations

Publicity Campaign

Pre-event, during event, and post-event publicity decisions are all important opportunities for furthering the message of zero waste. Use your publicity efforts to acquaint and remind attendees of zero waste strategies and to emulate these by using alternatives to printed publicity materials.

Pre-event publicity: Pre-event publicity campaigns can include the following message: "We are striving to make this a zero waste event with the goal of 90%+ waste diversion."

Incorporate waste diversion messages by using:



- An official event website, Facebook or event page
- An official event printed material (flyer, poster, postcard, etc. made from recycled content)
- Other publicity through social media, press release, newsletters, ads, etc.

During event publicity: Include the following message during your event to showcase diversion efforts: “[Event Name] is helping to reduce our impact on the environment by diverting at least (50% or 75%) of our waste from the landfill. Help us reduce waste by using the sorting stations around this event to compost and recycle. Thank you for contributing to a greener [Community Name].” Instead of creating new signage, add this message to existing event signage where possible.

Here are some ideas for spreading your zero waste messages at the event:

- Provide signage at all sorting stations
- Create an educational area(s) with information and activities about event diversion efforts
- Banner (not one-time-only use, made from recycled and recyclable material)
- Stage announcements
- Other methods (e.g. mascot, flash mob, stage game helping attendees learn correct sorting methods)

Go paperless! Invitations, Tickets, and Registration

To reduce waste upstream, consider online and email invitations. Use an electronic system for guest responses and registration. The following are a few other options to consider for reducing waste:

- If you decide to use paper invitations for a more formal occasion, select those made from post-consumer recycled paper or paper alternatives.
- Make a note in the invitation that the event will be zero waste.
- When applicable, encourage attendees to bring reusable containers in order to bring leftovers home with them.

Post-Event:

Section 1 – Tracking your Success

Evaluation

The post-event evaluation can provide helpful information for your future events. Create a way to collect feedback (paper or online Google surveys) from staff and volunteers to give feedback as to what methods were working and how the event could improve. Likewise, asking attendees and vendors to fill out an online survey about how they were impacted by this event being zero waste.



If you collected data on your diversion efforts, here's when you put all that together! Add up your data, fill out your spread sheets, graph out your charts! Next time you host your event you'll be able to track changes and improvements.

Give thanks and report success

Consider sharing your zero waste event experience. Imagine the impact of:

Publicizing your zero waste successes and explaining how these successes were measured.

- Noting any revisions and recommendations for future zero waste events.
- Distributing your observations and experiences via press releases and/or newsletters.

Thank your volunteers, vendors, and attendees for participating. Consider providing attendees with your post-report once it's completed. Lastly, pledge to host your next event as zero waste! You can use your survey responses and experience to implement any necessary changes to the event's design and planning to make it even easier and to have an even bigger impact.

Thank you for organizing for change!

