

ZERO WASTE EVENT GUIDE



**ZERO
WASTE**
SONOMA

JULY
2026

ZERO WASTE EVENTS

ABOUT US

Zero Waste Sonoma (ZWS) is the joint powers authority of the nine incorporated cities and the County of Sonoma. Zero Waste Sonoma's mission is to empower personal action in waste reduction and materials management by implementing practical solutions to protect our natural resources.

HAULERS

Sonoma County Resource Recovery services Windsor + Sebastopol
(707) 795-7470 M-F 8A-5P
www.sonomacorr.com

Sonoma Garbage Collectors services Sonoma (707) 996-7555
M-F 8A-4:30P
www.sonomagarbage.com

Recology Sonoma Marin services all remaining cities and unincorporated Sonoma County
(800) 243-0291 M-F 8A-6P,
Sa-Su 7A-3P
www.recology.com/SonomaMarin

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WHY ZERO WASTE?

THE BASICS

Zero Waste is the goal of reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting to keep materials out of the landfill. Events can be inherently wasteful, but there are a number of strategies that can be implemented to reduce the waste produced from large gatherings which contributes significantly to climate change. In addition, waste reduction can also limit the energy and resources needed to produce single-use and consumable items. By recycling materials like metal, glass, cardboard, and certain plastics into new products and composting organic materials like paper plates, wood utensils, food, and yard debris, these resources are put toward better uses than landfilling.



WHO IS THIS FOR?

- Event producers/managers
- Event venues
- Farmers market organizers
- Catering and vending companies
- Individuals hosting gatherings

LAWS + ORDINANCES

POLYSTYRENE AND DISPOSABLE FOOD SERVICE WARE ORDINANCES (MAY VARY BY JURISDICTION)

Jurisdictions in Sonoma County have adopted local ordinances to ban the sale of certain polystyrene foam products and limit the use of non-recyclable or non-compostable disposable food ware. Please confirm specific requirements within your jurisdiction.

ABOUT THE LOCAL ORDINANCES

- Prohibit polystyrene foam food ware and food ware containing per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) distributed by food and beverage providers.
- Prohibit polystyrene foam food ware and specified polystyrene foam products sold by retail stores.
- Require food/beverage providers and some special events to use locally compostable or recyclable single-use food service ware and accessories.
- Require food/beverage providers to provide single-use straws, lids, cutlery, and to-go condiment packages only upon request.
- Encourage use of reusables.

For more information and to report noncompliant businesses, visit zerowastesonoma.gov/foodware.

SB 1383

- All large venues and events are required to provide 3-bin waste collection systems (garbage, recycling, and organics) to vendors and attendees. Bins must be clearly labeled, easily accessible, and each set of 3 bins placed next to each other.
- Requires large venues and large events to donate edible food to feed people. Enforcement of this law went into effect January 1, 2024.

QUICK TO-DO LIST FOR EVENTS

STAGE ONE: PRE-EVENT

Successful zero waste events start with the pre-planning steps with regard to smart purchasing, reuse options, recycling and organics collection, positioning waste stations, and public messaging.

MANAGEMENT BUY-IN: Getting commitment from decision-makers that participate in the financial and operational decisions is a key first step. Present the negative impacts of waste vs. the benefits of zero waste (cost savings from disposal fees, positive public image, tax deductions from donating food, and environmental stewardship).

REUSE: A system utilizing durable cups, plates, and utensils is the most sustainable choice as these items can be reused thousands of times. Once purchased, vendors can bypass or limit new single-use alternatives, saving on cost. Some event organizers implement a deposit system for service ware to offset replacement costs if participants do not return the item(s). Encourage attendees to bring their own water vessels to utilize water refill stations to reduce single-use plastics.



SOME REUSE OPTIONS:



- UTILIZE ZERO WASTE SONOMA'S \$600 MINI-GRANT FOR REUSABLE FOOD WARE, OR INFRASTRUCTURE, MATERIALS, AND SERVICES THAT SUPPORT REUSE
- FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HYDRATION STATIONS, AND OTHER REUSABLE CUP AND FOOD SERVICE WARE PROVIDERS AT:

WWW.ZEROWASTESONOMA.GOV/ZERO-WASTE-EVENTS

IDENTIFY WHAT TO RECYCLE AND COMPOST: Recyclables can be commingled into one bin or separated based on material type. Generally mixed recyclables go into the blue bin, and food soiled paper, food, and fiber-only compostables go into the green bin. Remember to have vendors break down cardboard and segregate into a separate pile. Your waste hauler may provide sorting guides for waste stations, to make participation easy for attendees.

Segregating back-end items after the event:

- Metal hangers: most dry cleaners accept these for reuse, otherwise haul to metal recycling bin at County Transfer Stations (not in the blue dumpster)
- Clean plastic film: soft plastic can be recycled at CCNB in Santa Rosa or inquire with local grocers
- Non-plastic wine corks: collect from event bars and deposit at select grocery stores
- Cardboard: arrange a cardboard-only bin with your hauler, or recycle at a County Transfer Station, CCNB, or Windsor Material Facility
- Pallets: arrangements should be made for pick-up

COMPOSTABLE PRODUCTS: In Sonoma County, only unlined, fiber-only items are accepted by the local compost facilities. ***That means “biodegradable” / compostable plastic products or plastic coated / lined fiber items must be disposed of as garbage.***

WASTE-FREE EVENT PROMOTION: Consider incorporating the event’s zero waste efforts in various outreach channels such as:

- Official website & banner ads
- Social media
- Promotional materials (flyers/posters/cards made from recycled content if printed)
- Press release, newsletters, ads
- Public and stage announcements
- Smartphone App
- Vendor application
- Can participants bring their own bottles/ utensils/ cups/containers from home?
- Is there a discount on beverages if attendees provide their own reusable cup?



STAGE ONE: PRE-EVENT, CONTINUED

OBTAINING SUPPLIES: Communicate to vendors the objectives of the zero waste event, and share recycling and composting plans such as:

- Vendor/supplier expectations in the waste flow plan
- Acceptable and unacceptable items to avoid (such as polystyrene foam, PFAS, plastic water bottles, or single-use disposables)
- Waste minimization recommendations
- Reusable products options
- Consider bulk purchasing food and drink service ware products, and selling them at cost to event vendors to ensure consistency. Prioritize reusables, or look for unlined fiber/wood/bamboo plates, containers, and utensils, and clear plastic PET cold cups.
- Create a purchasing list to share with vendors that includes this information.

VENDOR AGREEMENTS: Engaging with vendors is essential, as they create a large portion of the waste stream at events. Vendor agreements are a tool to inform, educate and encourage participation. Sample language includes:

- Be sure to comply with the local Polystyrene Foam and Disposable Foodware Ordinance.
- Use paper and other compostable products when it is not feasible to use reusable plates, cups, etc.
- Our event maintains a policy of mandatory recycling. We are doing our part to ensure a clean, environmentally friendly world for future generations to enjoy.
- Please use the recycling bins provided. Other items that can be recycled at this event include glass bottles, plastic beverage containers, and aluminum cans.
- Break down (flatten) all cardboard boxes and keep them in your area for pickup.
- Place food and food soiled paper in the green organics collection bin.
- Excess food that is still safe to eat and has not yet been served should be donated at the end of each day to a pre-identified local non-profit.
- Grease bin areas must be covered to prevent contamination or grease runoff during rain.



DEBRIS BOXES



BINS



CARTS



EVENT BOXES

QUESTIONS FOR THE HAULER:

- WE EXPECT XX ATTENDEES, HOW MANY CARTS/BINS WILL THE EVENT NEED?
- WHERE AND WHEN WILL THE CARTS/BINS BE DELIVERED?
- HOW OFTEN WILL DUMPSTERS BE EMPTIED?
- DOES THE HAULER COLLECT GARBAGE, ORGANIC WASTE, AND/OR RECYCLABLES?
- SHOULD RECYCLABLES BE MIXED OR SEPARATED?
- CAN THE HAULER PROVIDE SIGNAGE OR SORTING GUIDES FOR THE WASTE STATIONS?
- (IF A LARGE EVENT) CAN THE HAULER PROVIDE A SESSION OF SORTING TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS/GREEN TEAM?
- DOES THE HAULER TAKE WASTE TO A MATERIALS RECOVERY FACILITY?
- DOES HAULER PICK UP AFTER BUSINESS HOURS AND/OR ON WEEKENDS?



COLLECTION SERVICE: Reach out to your local waste hauler to begin coordinating collection service for recyclables and organic materials. Determine the necessary level of service, where the collection bins and dumpsters will be strategically placed, when they will be delivered to the event location, and when they will be serviced after the event. Temporary collection containers for clean cardboard or mixed paper are available in Windsor.

SIGNAGE: Garbage, recycling, and organics collection bins should be coded with photo images at eye level, and above the bin to remind staff, attendees, vendors, and volunteers where specific items go. Taping example items on the signs or receptacles is also an effective strategy.



COMPOST EVENT SIGN



RECYCLE EVENT SIGN



GARBAGE EVENT SIGN

STAGE ONE: PRE-EVENT, CONTINUED

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES: Recycling bins should be blue, and organics bins should be green, if possible. Different styles of bins for recycling and organics collection can be used for different purposes. Bin lids can be customized to reduce contamination. Check with the hauler or venue to find out if temporary bins are available. For example, Recology Sonoma Marin offers temporary cardboard event boxes for purchase that can be recycled, reused, or composted (if wet or food soiled) after the event. Include bin locations and water refill stations on the event map. Staff and volunteers should be provided supplies to support the collection of materials:

- Trash Pickers • Gloves • Clipboards • Tape or zip ties for posting signs
- Scales, if material will be weighed • Data sheet for recording material weights • Camera • Water • Clothing (ex. t-shirt, vest, hat, apron, or sticker) to identify event staff • Extra liner bags for collection bins

DONATIONS: Before the event, research opportunities to donate food to local food shelters, food pantries, churches, or charitable organizations. Inedible food and liquids may be donated to pig farms. Identify and contact appropriate establishments to arrange pickup or delivery of food after the event is over. **Organizations donating food are protected from criminal and civil liability under the Good Samaritan Act.** A non-exhaustive list is available at <https://zerowastesonoma.gov/materials/food>.

- Refer to SB 1383 compliance requirements for large events: www.zerowastesonoma.gov/sb1383
- Large events may generate some level of construction & demolition during build-out, and in these cases, organizers should consider ordering a dedicated C&D debris box, or repurposing, reusing, or donating materials such as wood, shade cloths, artificial grass, tarps, etc. after the event.



STAGE TWO: EVENT DAY



SETUP: Place collection bins according to the event map on the day before or morning-of. Liners may improve collection efficiency and minimize bin washing costs. Block or cover city bins or remove any single-standing receptacle, instead utilizing 3-bin waste stations, which should be set up in a consistent configuration throughout the event space, especially in high-traffic and dining areas. ***Having fewer waste stations is more efficient for collection and easier for volunteers.***

MATERIAL COLLECTION AND MONITORING: Designate a meeting point for staff and volunteers to congregate and receive information or new tasks, such as:

- Attach signage above, and near waste stations
- Assign teams to collect full bags of recycling from event waste stations and transfer to the holding area
- Sort bins and pull out contamination throughout the event
- Monitor containers and specify to attendees what goes where
- Track weights of recycling, organics, and landfill disposal

STAGE TWO: EVENT DAY, CONTINUED

ATTENDEE ENGAGEMENT: Identify ways to share information with attendees about the zero waste event efforts:

- Identify bin station locations on event maps
- Remind attendees about zero waste efforts through public and on-stage announcement
- Host a recycling info booth or primary bin station that allows attendees to ask questions about how and where to recycle materials
- If possible, assign volunteers to staff bin stations and provide technical assistance

DAILY PROMOTION: During the event, zero waste activities should be publicized through social media, public announcement, stage announcements, media interviews, etc. Ask vendors and concessionaires to display zero-waste related signs in their booths. Recycling staff and volunteers should wear distinctive shirts or hats with program logos.



Gravenstein Apple Fair, photo by Jim Noonan

STAGE THREE: POST-EVENT

CLEANUP:

- Break down and flatten cardboard boxes
- Confirm when the hauler is collecting the recyclables and organic materials
- Clean/return rented reusable items
- Break down all the waste station bins and stage them in a central collection area
- Coordinate the pickup or delivery of donatable items
- Store extra supplies for next year (waste station bins, signage, bin liners, gloves, litter pickers, reusables, etc)
- Monitor all waste stations at end of the event to prevent contamination and dumping from vendors into incorrect containers, ensuring cleanup/sorting is complete before the hauler collects clean bins and dumpsters.

POST-EVENT SORTING: Staff and volunteers may be required to sort contaminants from the recycling and organic waste bins to avoid a contamination fee. Set up a table where staff can separate contaminants from the recyclables and organics. Some businesses can be hired to do this for large events. See the event resource guide at www.zerowastesonoma.gov/zero-waste-events.

RECORD RESULTS: In order to calculate waste diversion, the weights of all landfill waste, recycling, and organics should be recorded by staff.

RECOGNITION:

- Send certificates of appreciation to vendors that successfully participated in waste reduction and recycling programs
- Send certificates of appreciation to volunteers
- Consider offering registration discounts or other incentives to top performing vendors at future events or other rewards for waste-free efforts
- Express appreciation to attendees for helping make the event a success
- Highlight an example in a local paper or website and social media before or after the event

FEEDBACK: request feedback from staff, vendors, concessionaires, stakeholders, attendees, and the haulers soon after the event. Invite honest evaluations to better understand challenges and seek solutions for program improvements the next year.



ZERO WASTE EVENT CHECKLIST

EVENT SERVICES, ZERO WASTE STATIONS, EVENT GREENING:

Make a Zero Waste Plan

- ☐ At least 30 days prior to event, order recycling, composting, and trash collection services.
- ☐ Request or create event signage for your bins.
- ☐ Order debris boxes or metal bins that have locks to avoid contamination or dumping.
- ☐ Map out where zero waste stations and debris stations will be located.
- ☐ Plan to purchase your event inventory around waste prevention (tip: this will lower disposal fees).
- ☐ Determine how materials will be monitored and sorted after the event.
- ☐ Schedule pickups for leftover food and other donations.
- ☐ Determine how materials will be transported from zero waste stations to debris boxes.

Setting up zero waste (bin) stations

- ☐ Stations should be clearly marked and visible above a crowd.
- ☐ Recycling, composting, and trash bins should always be grouped together with proper labeling.
- ☐ If you do use liners (compostable or plastic) at the end of the event, all material must be loose in the appropriate container. Liners should be removed and placed in the landfill if needed.

FOODWARE AND HYDRATION STATIONS:

Foodware

- ☐ Plastic stirrers, toothpicks, and beverage plugs are banned. Acceptable alternatives include paper, wood, and other natural fiber.
- ☐ All food and beverage accessories like lids, cutlery, and napkins are to be provided upon request OR at a self-serve station.
- ☐ Distribution of single-use plastic straws including, compostable plastic ones are restricted. Acceptable alternatives include paper and other natural fiber.
- ☐ All straws may only be made available upon request i.e. behind the counter.
- ☐ Foodware provided must be reusable, recyclable, or compostable.
- ☐ Compostable foodware must be made of fiber only, GreenScreen Certified for safer chemicals, and BPI Certified Compostable.

Hydration Stations

- ☐ Hydration stations serve as an alternative for bottled and packaged water.
- ☐ Contact your permitting agency to find out how to access water for your event.

Working with Food Vendors

- ☐ Include zero waste requirements into vendors contracts.
- ☐ Educate vendors/janitorial staff/volunteers on the zero waste requirements and procedures.

REUSABLES:

- ☐ Provide, lend, or sell reusable beverage cups to event attendees.
- ☐ Promote or incentivize attendees to bring their own reusable beverage cup, straw, and utensils.