

HOSTING YOUR ZERO WASTE EVENT

Zero Waste events produce little or no trash for the landfill at the end of the event. All remains are recyclable, reusable, or compostable.

Eldorado/285 Recycles assists local organizations to conduct zero waste events. For events at which food is served, there are procedures to:

- 1) Collect and compost all uneaten or discarded food;
- 2) Use reusable dinnerware (real plates, metal forks, knives, etc.); or
- 3) Use compostable or recyclable dinnerware.

In other words, among the many pounds of food served and dinnerware used, NOTHING (or almost nothing) is thrown out as garbage. For example, the 2017 Eldorado Fire and Rescue Service barbecue which served more than 800 people yielded: 304 gallons of compostable material and 18 lbs. of recyclable material. Unfortunately we did collect 7 gallons of trash. Trash was comprised of plastic forks used in error, ketchup and other condiment packets, also used in error, and miscellaneous items brought in by the public. We are learning from our mistakes! A zero waste event may seem complicated, but with a little planning this kind of event is achievable for any organization.

For a zero waste event, you will need to use compostable or recyclable dinnerware, which can usually be found locally or online for a reasonable price. Among the many options, here are a few links to products we have used.

EcoProducts — <https://www.ecoproducts.com>

Green Paper Products — <https://greenpaperproducts.com>

World Centric—<http://www.worldcentric.org>

In addition, some products may be available locally at sources such as Office Depot and even local grocery stores. When purchasing compostable materials it is important to select those that are BPI-certified (Biodegradable Products Institute).

Compostable serving ware must be composted in a commercial composting system that reaches higher temperatures than home systems, sufficient to break down the components. Drinking cups look the same as plastic, but they will break down. Some plastic serving materials such as cups may be recycled. It is important to check with your local recycling program to determine which plastics are currently permitted.

It is possible a caterer will be supplying serving materials. It is important to get initial buy-in from the organizers and caterers and to review requirements and expectations during the planning stage.

Food can be taken either to a commercial composting facility or a backyard compost system, but, depending on your event, you may need to separate what can be deposited in a backyard system and what cannot (e.g., meat and dairy items). This is not necessary for commercial operations.

Set Up

Collection of compost and recyclables requires well-marked containers. A contractor, such as Reunity Resources, in Santa Fe can deliver their own carts. It is also possible to provide your own containers, lined with compostable bags, and deliver those to Reunity yourself. ReunityResources.com (505) 393-1196

Recyclables can be collected in any well-marked container. Eldorado/285 Recycles uses Clearstream frames and Clearstream bags, which are removed and emptied at a local recycling facility or put into a home recycling bin. If it is a large event, it may be helpful to mark container locations with a large visual such as a flag so they will be easily recognized by the public.

Bag Sources

Bags for Clearstreams: clearstreamrecycling.com. Or use any clear bag that will fit the frame or your container. Be sure that the recycling bag does not go into the container with the recycling at the recycling center or into a home can. Bags are tanglers and tanglers contaminate the load!

Bags for compostable material: BioBag, biobagusa.com

Many of these bags are also available at online retailers and Clearstream sells bags that fit their frames.

Checklist for Public Zero Waste Events

To help you plan an effective zero waste event, here is a step-by-step list.

Before the event

1. Make sure both the organizers and the caterers or food suppliers are on board and that only recyclable or compostable materials will be used.
2. Request "Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) certified" products or request people bring their own serving utensils, plates, and cloth napkins. (Reunity requires BPI certification.)
3. Check for any non-compostable materials brought to the event, as caterers or food suppliers often make mistakes.
4. Make sure you have definite locations in mind so that recyclable and compostable materials can be taken to the right place. In Santa Fe, that is easy: Reunity will take the compostable materials, and the local convenience centers or your private waste hauler will take the recyclables.
5. Train custodians, servers, bartenders, and volunteers so all know what goes where. A simple and short instruction sheet for staff can be helpful.

During the Event

1. Make sure all food arrives in reusable or recyclable containers.
2. Cover foods if necessary with reusable lids or foil, not plastic Saran-type wrap.
3. Do not use single-serve packets of condiments like ketchup, sugar, salt and pepper; use plastic bottles so that unused portions can be saved or empty containers recycled.
4. Do not use non-compostable materials such as plastic wrap, coffee stirrers, plastic straws, plastic utensils, ice cream wrappers, or tea in foil bags.

5. Make a brief announcement about the zero waste event and what you are trying to do. Remind attendees that **contamination is harmful!** Contamination can ruin the material for composting and recycling. Remind guests what can be composted.

6. Put out signage. Taping a picture of what goes where to the containers or bins you will use for collection is VERY helpful.

7. Most importantly, staff the waste stations to ensure that compost and recyclables are not contaminated.

Home Events

Hosting a Zero Waste Event at Home is simpler because the host controls all the elements from food to washable or compostable serving ware. As with a public event, if compostable serving ware is used, it must be composted in a commercial facility. The food component can be composted in a home system or commercially.

You will be pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm generated when people realize what is possible!