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Guide to Hosting Nearly Zero Waste Events:
Embracing Reuse and Mindful Resource Management

Introduction


In a world where waste generation culture prevails, we invite you to be the change. Our guide is a testament to the strength of reusing, a simple yet profound act that holds the key to a brighter, sustainable future. By shifting our focus towards reuse, we can break free from the chains of waste, conserve precious resources, and nurture a planet where harmony between humankind and nature thrives. Join us on this journey of transformation, as we discover the beauty and potential in every reusable choice, shaping a world that cherishes rather than discards. Let's make a difference, one reused step at a time!

Whether you're planning a festival, conference, wedding, or any other gathering, this guide is here to help you navigate the exciting journey of hosting nearly zero waste events.

How to use the guide
This guide provides information that will help you plan and stage a successful zero waste event. It is structured as follows:
1. Overview of zero waste at events – to give the big picture
2. Guidance notes – setting out the 11 actions to hold a successful zero waste event
3. Appendices (4 appendices)

What is a zero waste event?
An event is where people, materials and energy come together in one space for a limited period of time - Zero Waste Europe.

A zero-waste event is all about minimizing waste and using resources wisely. It aims to reduce or eliminate waste by taking various steps, like producing less waste in the first place, reusing items, recovering useful materials, recycling, and composting. By following these strategies, event organizers can create eco-friendly events that have a positive impact on the environment and communities.
This guide is designed to provide event organisers and municipalities with practical strategies and actionable steps to significantly waste production. We will explore various aspects, from understanding the impact of food waste to planning for success, implementing waste reduction strategies, communicating with stakeholders, and continuously improving your approach.

Throughout this guide, we will emphasize the importance of collaboration, education, and awareness. We firmly believe that by working together, sharing knowledge, and implementing innovative solutions, we can create events that are not only enjoyable and memorable but also sustainable and responsible.

Getting out of our current linear model requires rethinking systemically the current way products are delivered to consumers. When it comes to packaging, waste prevention and reuse should become a top priority for the EU.

A zero-waste event is designed to reduce or even eliminate the production of waste and limit the use of raw materials, through different areas of action:
Reducing waste at source (because the best waste is still one that isn't there!), reuse, recovery, recycling and composting.

### Zero Waste Hierarchy

- **Refuse/Retink/Redesign**
  Refuse what we don't need and change the way we produce and consume by redesigning business models, goods, and packaging in order to reduce resource use and waste.

- **Reduce and Reuse**
  Minimise the quantity, toxicity, and ecological footprint and any operation by which products or components that are not waste are used again for the same purpose for which they were conceived.

- **Prepare for reuse**
  Checking, cleaning, or repairing operations, by which products or components of products that have become waste are prepared so that they can be reused without any other pre-processing.

- **Recycling/Composting/Anaerobic digestion**
  High quality material recovery from separately collected waste streams.

- **Material and chemical recovery**
  Technologies to recover materials from mixed waste into new valuable materials in an environmentally-sound way.

- **Residuals management**
  What cannot be recovered from mixed waste is biologically stabilised prior to landfilling.

- **Unacceptable**
  Options that don’t allow for material recovery, have a high environmental impact and create lock-in effects that threaten the transition to zero waste: waste to energy incineration, co-incineration, plastics-to-fuel, landfilling of non-stabilised waste, gasification, pyrolysis, illegal dumping, open burning, and littering.
Section 1: Embrace Tap Water
Encourage attendees to bring their own reusable water bottles to the event. Place easily accessible tap water stations throughout the venue. By eliminating single-use plastic water bottles, you not only reduce waste but also save money on purchasing disposable bottles. Additionally, providing fresh tap water is often more convenient for participants, who can easily refill their bottles whenever needed.

Section 2: Thoughtful Gift-Giving
Instead of traditional physical gifts, promote the idea of experiential gifts or digital alternatives. Consider offering experiences such as workshops, classes, or vouchers for local businesses. Alternatively, you can provide attendees with digital resources or access to exclusive content related to the event. This approach reduces waste associated with gift packaging and supports the event’s sustainability message.

Section 3: Mindful Buffet Planning
Design a menu that includes a diverse selection of delicious and nutritious plant-based options. Offer a smaller quantity of sustainably sourced meats to cater to varying dietary preferences while reducing the overall environmental impact. By planning the buffet thoughtfully, you can minimize food waste, control costs, and demonstrate your commitment to sustainability.

Section 4: Minimalist Packaging
Work with vendors and suppliers that prioritize sustainable and eco-friendly packaging solutions. Choose materials that can be reused or recycled, reducing the amount of waste generated during the event. Not only does this help the environment, but it can also lead to cost savings in the long run.

Section 5: Sustainable Decorations
Opt for reusable or biodegradable decorations instead of single-use items. Get creative with natural materials, like flowers, leaves, and wood, which can be composted after use. Consider sourcing decor locally to minimize transportation-related emissions and support local artisans. Sustainable
decorations add charm and uniqueness to your events while aligning with the zero waste mission.

Section 6: Partner with Eco-Friendly Suppliers

Collaborate with suppliers and service providers who prioritize environmental responsibility. Seek out companies that offer eco-friendly products, services, and practices. By supporting businesses that share your sustainability goals, you contribute to a positive eco-conscious ecosystem and may even negotiate better deals due to shared values.

Section 7: Localize Your Partnerships

Engage local companies for event services and supplies. By choosing local vendors, you reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation and support the regional economy. Building strong relationships with local partners can also lead to more efficient communication and better collaboration.

Section 8: Banish Single-Use Plastics

Make a commitment to eliminate single-use plastics from your event. Instead, provide reusable alternatives like cutlery, cups, and straws that can be washed and used at future events. Additionally, consider using compostable or biodegradable alternatives for items that can't be reused. Properly communicating the plastic-free policy to attendees ensures their cooperation in the zero waste efforts.

Section 9: Recycling and Waste Management

Implement an effective waste management plan with clearly labeled recycling and composting stations. Educate event participants about what items should be placed in each bin to ensure proper waste disposal. Engage volunteers or staff to monitor the stations and answer any questions attendees may have about recycling and waste management.
Section 10: Communication is Key

Spread the message of your zero waste initiative through various communication channels. Utilize social media, email campaigns, and event websites to inform attendees about your sustainability efforts. Encourage participants to join in the cause by bringing their own reusable items and actively participating in waste reduction.

Section 11: Monitor Progress

Track and measure your waste reduction efforts at each event. Analyze the data to identify areas for improvement and celebrate the positive impact of your sustainable practices. Keeping records of waste reduction achievements can motivate organizers and participants to continue their commitment to zero waste events.

By implementing the practices and recommendations provided in this guide, you have the power to create nearly zero food waste events that are not only environmentally responsible but also financially beneficial and convenient.
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Annex 1: Checklist for Nearly Zero Waste Events

Define Your Goals:
- Determine your waste reduction targets for the event.
- Set specific objectives to achieve a zero waste outcome.
- Adopt a Plastic Prevention Plan (mainly for municipalities)

Form a Team:
- Appoint a team to oversee waste reduction efforts.
- Assign responsibilities to team members.

Conduct a Waste Audit:
- Evaluate previous event waste to identify areas for improvement.
- Analyze waste patterns and types to inform your waste reduction plan.

Select a Sustainable Venue:
- Choose a venue with recycling and composting facilities.
- Ensure the venue aligns with zero waste principles.

Source Sustainable Supplies:
- Prioritize eco-friendly and reusable materials for event decor and signage.
- Work with suppliers committed to sustainability.

Plan a Zero Waste Menu:
- Design a menu featuring locally sourced and sustainable food options.
- Minimize single-use packaging and plastics.

Promote Digital Communication:
- Utilize digital invitations, registration, and event information.
- Encourage attendees to use mobile apps for updates.

Encourage BYO (Bring Your Own):
- Encourage attendees to bring reusable water bottles, cups, and containers.
- Provide water refill stations and washing facilities.

Set Up Waste Stations:
- Establish waste sorting stations for recycling, composting, and landfill waste and ensure participants have access to them.
- Clearly label bins.

Donate Excess Food:
- Partner with local food banks or charities to donate surplus food.
- Coordinate with caterers for safe food recovery.
Composting & Food Scraps:
- Implement composting bins for food scraps and biodegradable materials.
- Educate attendees on compostable items.

Communicate the Zero Waste Message:
- Use marketing materials and social media to promote your zero waste efforts.
- Encourage participants to join the sustainability movement.

Monitor Waste Reduction:
- Track waste generation during and after the event.
- Measure progress towards your waste reduction targets.

Evaluate and Improve:
- Conduct a post-event evaluation to assess the success of your initiatives.
- Gather feedback for future improvements.

Annex 2: Less waste

1. Develop a waste reduction plan that includes both public guest areas and back of house food preparation areas.
2. Use digital communications (conference website, RSVP, social media) to reduce paper waste.
3. Select a venue that offers comprehensive recycling and composting services.
4. Work with food vendors to create a preferred service ware material list.
5. Select food vendors that offer the use of washable plates, silverware and linens.

Annex 3: Example Questions for Vendors and Caterers

1. What items will be served or available for guests (food and/or giveaways depending on the vendor/exhibitor)?
2. For food vendors and/or exhibitors: How are the items packaged?
3. For exhibitors: Do the items contain any percent of post-consumer recycled content?
4. For exhibitors: Are any of the items recyclable?
5. For food vendors: Can you provide reusable service ware? (tablecloths, silverware, glasses, mugs, plates and cloth napkins that can be washed and reused)
6. For food vendors: If not, will you be able to obtain certified compostable service ware for the event?
Annex 4: Unacceptable Items

Expanded Polystyrene (Styrofoam™) Non-recyclable and non-compostable products including plastic bags, wraps, condiment packages or similar soft plastics. Plastic straws or lids Foil or plastic-backed paper products (examples on back) Glass bottles. If glass ends up in the compost stream, it contaminates that load. Any giveaways that aren’t reusable or recyclable (examples on back)

Sources:


Disclaimer:
The "Guide to Hosting Zero Waste Events" provided by Friends of the Earth Cyprus is intended for general informational purposes only. While we have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information presented, it is essential to recognize that each organization's waste management needs may vary. As such, this guide should be used as a flexible resource that can be adapted and customized according to the unique requirements and circumstances of your organization or event. The strategies and recommendations outlined in this guide can serve as a foundation for creating sustainable and nearly zero waste events, but we encourage you to tailor and implement them in a manner that best aligns with your specific goals and objectives.