



Home & Environment

Planning a Zero-waste Event

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In this Publication

- What is a zero-waste event?
- Why zero-waste?
- What is compostable?
- Planning a Zero-waste Event

Today the average American creates a little over 4 pounds of waste per day. Of that, roughly 1 ½ pounds is recycled or composted, meaning that more than 2½ pounds of waste per person per day is discarded to landfills or combusted (with energy recovery).

Waste management is the collection, processing and disposal, or reuse of recyclable and non-recyclable materials. The ultimate goal of waste management is to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfills to the absolute minimum through recycling and/or reuse of all suitable materials.

What is a zero-waste event?

A zero-waste event can be any type of event (e.g., meeting, business event, birthday party, field day, wedding, etc.). The goal of a zero-waste event is to minimize the amount of waste produced. The key to hosting a zero-waste event is planning well in advance of the event.

Why zero-waste?

Saving landfill space. In Kentucky, there are nearly 3,000 acres of landfill space permitted for disposal (Figure 1). Landfills are areas of land designed for the disposal of solid waste. In 2012, Kentucky sent 4,157,231 tons of waste to landfills.

Reducing greenhouse gases.

Throughout the life cycle of a product, from the harvesting and/or extraction of raw materials, to the manufacturing, transportation, use, and disposal of the product, greenhouse gases are emitted. Increases in greenhouse gases cause the Earth to get warmer. By reusing products and reducing the amount of waste produced, we can decrease the amount of greenhouse gases emitted.

Conserving natural resources.

Throughout the life cycle of a product, from the harvesting and/or extraction



Figure 1. Kentucky sent 4,157,231 tons of waste to landfills in 2012. Photo courtesy of the Kentucky Division of Waste Management

of raw materials, to the manufacturing, transportation, use, and disposal of the item, natural resources (e.g., trees, ore, oil, water, etc.) are used. We can conserve natural resources by reducing the amount of wastes produced, and recycling and reusing items whenever possible.

What is compostable?

Myth: Biodegradable products will breakdown and biodegrade in a landfill.

Fact: Biodegradable products do NOT breakdown and biodegrade in a landfill. Landfills lack the proper balance of oxygen, moisture, temperature, and nutrients needed for biodegradable items to breakdown and decompose.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines biodegradable as the ability of a material to break down physically and/or chemically by microorganisms. Although biodegradable plastics were first introduced in the late 1980s, standards were not

developed until 2002. These standards (ASTM D6400 and ASTM D6868) test products labeled as compostable and/or biodegradable. The tests that are conducted examine how the products breakdown in municipal and industrial composting facilities. A product that meets Standard ASTM D6400 and/or ASTM D6868 will breakdown within a time period similar to other known compostable materials when placed in a municipal or industrial composting facility. The Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) and US Composting Council have created a Compostable Label (Figure 2) for products that meet ASTM D6400 and D6868 Standards so that consumers, waste haulers, and officials can easily identify these products. Note that products labeled compostable or biodegradable will NOT breakdown in a home composting bin or landfill. Home composting bins/piles do not reach the temperatures needed to breakdown these items.

Compostable products are biodegradable in a municipal or industrial



Figure 2. Compostable Label created by BPI and US Composting Council. Find a list of compostable products with the Compostable Label on the BPI website at <http://products.bpiworld.org/>.

composting facility. As these products breakdown they turn into valuable organic matter that can be used as a soil amendment or mulch. Compostable dishware and utensils are available from various retailers (e.g., big box stores, groceries, etc.). If compostable tableware is not feasible (due to factors such as costs, a commercial-scale compost facility is not available, etc.) paper plates and napkins can be used and composted in a backyard/home compost bin.

Planning a Zero-waste Event

The following list is provided to help make your next event zero-waste. These tips will help you as you plan and carry out your event.

Event Advertisement

- Use electronic media (e.g., websites, email/listservs, electronic newsletters, electronic invitations, and social media).

Food

- Have participants RSVP or register, online or by phone, to have an accurate headcount for food.
- Encourage participants to bring their own travel mug and reusable water bottle.

- Use tableware (e.g., plates, cups, utensils, cloth napkins and tablecloths) that can be washed and reused. Tableware can be borrowed from colleagues, family and friends or rented. If tableware is not available use compostable dishware and utensils if a commercial-scale composting facility is available. Check with your county Solid Waste Coordinator to find out if a commercial-scale composting facility is available in your area. County Solid Waste Coordinators' contact information is available online at <http://waste.ky.gov/RLA/Documents/Solid%20Waste%20Coordinators%208-25-10.pdf>.
- Avoid Styrofoam.
- Avoid individually wrapped items (e.g., chips, bottled water, packaged fork, knife, spoon, and napkin sets, etc.).
- Buy condiments, sugar, sweeteners, and creamers in bulk as opposed to single use packets.
- Offer buffet style meals in lieu of boxed meals (e.g., boxed lunches).
- Be mindful of serving size. Avoid serving more food than will be eaten.
- Donate excess food to local shelters or soup kitchens. Visit the Kentucky Food Banks Association's website at <http://www.kafb.org/> for information on local food pantries and shelters in your community that accept nonperishable food items. Not all shelters are equipped to accept prepared foods, such as prepared box lunches. In the Louisville area, Dare to Care Food Bank can provide information regarding donating prepared foods. For more information contact Dare to Care Food Bank at (502) 736-9409.

- Collect food waste to be composted. Commercial-scale composting facilities are able to accept items such as meats, bones, and baked goods, however, if composting in a backyard compost bin meats, bones, and baked goods are not recommended due to possible odor and rodent problems. For information about home composting contact your county Extension agent or download the Extension bulletin on home composting at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ho/ho75/ho75.pdf>.

In 2012, the single largest component of municipal solid waste being sent to landfills was not paper or plastic, aluminum cans or glass, but food waste. Roughly 34 million tons of food waste was thrown out in 2012. Food waste, which includes uneaten food and food preparation scraps, can be hard on our environment and our wallets.

Recycling and Composting

- Contact your county Solid Waste Coordinator to find out about local recycling and composting programs. Ask which items can be recycled in your community, including aluminum cans, aluminum foil, plastics, paper, and cardboard. If your community does not offer a recycling program, visit Earth911.com and/or Terracycle's websites for information and ideas on recycling and reuse. Earth911.com, <http://search.earth911.com/>, is a website that enables you

to search for locations near you that will accept items to be recycled. Terracycle, <https://www.terracycle.com/en-US/>, is a company that collects packaging and products to reuse and repurpose.

- Place recycling, composting, and waste receptacles near entryways and exits, food and eating areas, and high traffic areas.
- Label each container with reusable signs that have photographs and text stating the designated use. Print and laminate signs at the end of this publication to label receptacles at your events—signs can be adapted for your program.
- Designate one or more volunteers to monitor recycling and trash receptacles. Some individuals will inevitably place trash in the recycling container and recyclables in the trash container.

Decorations

- Use natural items that can be composted once the event is over (e.g., in spring and summer use fresh flowers, in fall use gourds, pumpkins, and mums, and in winter use holly sprigs and pine cones).
- Use cloth tablecloths that can be washed and reused.

Handouts

- Avoid handouts if possible. Have information available online for participants to view and print out if desired. (Send a follow-up email to all participants with noted websites or provide a one-page information sheet with websites discussed.) Or consider providing participants with information on a memory card or flash drive that can be reused.
- If handouts are provided, print on both sides and use paper made from recycled content.

Table 1. Recycling symbols and categories.

Symbol	Common items
PETE	Soda and water bottles
HDPE	Milk and juice bottles, cleaning product bottles, and plastic and trash bags
PVC	PVC piping and some cleaning and food product bottles
LDPE	Squeezable bottles, and food and shopping bags
PP	Bottle caps, some food and medicine bottles, and straws
PS	Rigid foam products such as cups, plates, and silverware, and some medicine bottles and CD cases
OTHER	All other plastics, including mixed and layered plastics

Contact your county Solid Waste Coordinator for information on recycling programs in your area.

Door Prizes and Gifts

- Offer items that are usable and locally made (e.g., native plant seeds, potted plants used as centerpieces, soaps, mugs, etc.).

Volunteers (e.g., Homemaker Members, 4-H'ers, Partner Agencies, etc.)

- Meet with volunteers to discuss the event (e.g., why zero-waste is important, the goals of the event, and their role at the event).
- Assign volunteers task (e.g., set-up, clean-up, food, waste receptacles, decorations, prizes/gifts, etc.).

Educating Others

- At the event, provide time to discuss with participants about zero-waste and the efforts to reduce waste at the event.
- Keep a record of your successes! Record the weight of compostables, recyclables, and trash collected at your event. Compare these recordings with future events. Did you compost and recycle more?
- Share successes with colleagues, partner agencies, and community members.

Regardless of what type of event you are planning, any event can be a zero-waste event if preparations are made in advance and plans are communicated with event organizers and participants.

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Compost these items here

- Compostable plates and cutlery
- Compostable cups
- Napkins and paper towels
- Food and food scraps



Recycle these items here

- Aluminum cans
- Glass
- Paper
- Plastic
- Cardboard



Trash goes here

Sent to landfill

- Styrofoam
- Cigarette butts
- Candy wrappers
- Plastic sandwich bags
- Juice boxes



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