

# Zero Waste Events at the University of Michigan

## *A How-To Guide*

*Prepared by U-M Plant Building & Grounds Services*

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### **What is a Zero Waste Event?**

A Zero Waste Event is any one-time program, occasion or event where the goal is to achieve as much waste diversion from the landfill as possible. At its core, a Zero Waste Event works to reduce, recycle and compost as much as possible.

### **How to Apply for a Zero Waste Event**

In order to ensure the success of U-M's Zero Waste Program, the Waste Reduction and Recycling Office (WRRO) shall approve events based upon the following criteria:

- The size of the event
- The availability of resources within U-M Waste Management Services
- The commitment to proper staff, volunteer and participant education

Contact the WRRO at [recycle@umich.edu](mailto:recycle@umich.edu) at least one month prior to the event.

### **Holding your Zero Waste Event**

Once the Zero Waste Event has been approved, contact the Plant Operations Call Center (POCC) to request compostables hauling service and collection bins, if necessary, for your event. Please make your request as far in advance as possible to guarantee availability. There is a charge for these services. Compostables hauling is \$12.50/cart/pickup while collection containers range from \$3-\$4 each, with a \$15 delivery charge.

### **Planning for your Zero Waste Event**

- ✓ Set a goal for your zero waste effort. While 100% recycling and composting may be out-of-reach, set a challenging but realistic goal for the event. Sharing this goal with event stakeholders may help garner their support for your effort, especially if you can show them how a specific change in event planning will help reach your goal (e.g. purchasing compostable dining ware will allow you to divert X% to composting).
- ✓ Begin with the end in mind. Think about the types of waste that will be generated during your event. If you aren't sure about what will be generated, look at what you are purchasing. Chances are all or part of what you are purchasing will become waste, therefore work to eliminate waste at the start. Strive to reduce what will have to be disposed of by looking for items with minimal or no packaging. Additionally, try to offer durable goods in the place of disposable ones.

### Examples of reducing waste

- Post event information, agendas, speaker bios and other event information on a website instead of providing paper copies. Promote the website often and widely.
- Offer online registration only.
- Avoid printing dates or locations on event signage so that it can be reused for future events.

### Examples of items with minimal packaging:

- Bulk condiments (e.g. ketchup, mustard, coffee creamer, sugar) instead of individual packets.
- Buffet-style food service instead of boxed lunches or other meals.
- Box-less boxed lunches. Place wrapped sandwiches on a platter, place bags of chips and whole fruit in baskets and offer a platter of cookies. Include signage stating “One item per guest.”

### Examples of durable goods

- China and silverware instead of disposable plates and forks.
- Cloth tablecloths instead of plastic or paper cloths.
- One large printed or projected (for a limited time) agenda instead of individually printed agendas.
- Collect and reuse plastic name-tag holders.

- ✓ Once you’ve worked to reduce the total amount of waste generated by the event, you must work to make the inevitable wastes recyclable or compostable. *Note that items that are acceptable for recycling or composting vary by where the event will be held and the markets that are available.* For instance, plastic cups are recyclable here at U-M, but may not be acceptable for recycling in other areas.

### Recyclables:

- Visit [www.recycle.umich.edu](http://www.recycle.umich.edu).

### Compostables:

- All organic wastes including food, napkins, coffee grounds and filters, toothpicks and compostable plastics.
- The Zero Waste Event Program will only accept plastics that are compostable per the ASTM D6400 or D6868 standard. When purchasing compostable items, be sure to inquire about the product meeting this standard.
- Work with event planners on purchasing compostable items. Commonly acceptable items include compostable plates, cups, bowls, forks, knives, spoons, brown napkins and general food waste. These items may be more expensive than conventional varieties.

- Compostables contaminated with non-compostable wastes must be thrown in the trash. While there are systems set up to handle contamination in recycling bins, such systems do not exist for compostables. If non-compostable items end up in compostables collection bins, it degrades the quality of the finished compost, resulting in an unusable product. Contamination mitigation is the #1 most important concern when collection compostable material at an event. It is imperative that volunteers stationed by compostables bins ensure that zero non-compostable items end up in these bins.
- ✓ Recyclables and trash will be handled as wastes and are traditionally handled by events. However, compostables must be taken to a loading dock or dumpster area for pickup by U-M Waste Management Services.
- ✓ Finally, ensure that you have ample volunteers available to staff the waste stations and provide quality control of the material that enters each waste stream.
  - Composting, recycling and trash bins should all be grouped to create a single 'waste station.'
  - As the **zero waste concept** is new to many people, it is imperative that all waste stations are staffed by someone knowledgeable enough of what type of material can go into which bin. For maximum impact, ensure that your volunteers are **only** responsible for monitoring the waste stations and not other tasks (e.g. ushering, food service, etc.).
  - You may also need staffing for other jobs, including taking filled bags to the dumpster area and lining empty bins.
  - If your event will be longer than 2 – 3 hours, you may need to sign volunteers up for shifts.
  - A pre-event training with volunteers is strongly suggested to help ensure that the same message will be conveyed by everyone and to answer any questions.
  - The #1 priority for volunteers: ensuring that only compostable materials end up in the compostables collection bins.

### During your Zero Waste Event

- ✓ Ensure that all waste stations are set up and bins are lined prior to the beginning of the event.
- ✓ Ensure that signage is posted in visible locations.
- ✓ Check bins often for contamination and remediate when possible.
- ✓ Promote, promote, promote!!!
  - Let event participants know what you are doing and why.

- Have announcements read throughout the event about the zero waste effort and its impact on the environment (e.g. 1 ton of paper recycled saves 17 trees).
- If printing signs, use post-consumer recycled content paper and post on reclaimed cardboard if possible.
- Contact the **Michigan Daily** ahead of time to see if they want to cover the event.
- Send event information to [www.sustainability.umich.edu](http://www.sustainability.umich.edu) for campus-wide promotion.