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Recycling and Waste Reduction at Your Special Event

Festivals, fairs, parades and other special events bring communities together and help raise money for organizations across the state. Unfortunately, these events also generate trash—lots of it! A California study found that the average participant at a public event generates 2.5 pounds of waste per day. Luckily, much of this waste is recyclable. Starting a recycling program at your event can save you money, enhance the reputation of your event and reduce the environmental impact of your event.



Why Recycle and Reduce Waste?

- **Reducing, reusing and recycling present a positive image to event attendees who are used to recycling at home and work.**
- **Recycling conserves valuable natural resources and reduces energy and pollution associated with production from virgin materials.**
- **Recycling supports local businesses that collect or process recyclable materials.**

What Should Be Recycled in Wisconsin?

- Aluminum, glass, steel (tin) and bi-metal containers
- Plastic containers #1 and #2, including milk jugs and detergent, soda and water bottles
- Magazines, catalogs and other materials printed on similar paper
- Newspaper and office paper
- Corrugated cardboard
- Computers, televisions, desktop printers, computer peripherals, DVD players, VCRs, digital video recorders, fax machines and phones with video displays
- Major appliances including air conditioners, clothes washers and dryers, dishwashers, refrigerators, freezers, stoves, ovens, dehumidifiers, furnaces, boilers and water heaters
- Yard waste, including grass clippings, leaves, yard and garden debris
- Lead acid vehicle batteries, automotive waste oils and waste tires
- Used oil filters

Designing Your Recycling and Waste Reduction Program

1. Understand your waste



Once you know the materials that may be generated, you can determine how and where to set up your event's recycling program. Your options will vary depending on the size of the event. Be realistic—work with your hauler to identify where you can best capture recyclables. Consider:

- **Behind the scenes:** A large amount of waste is produced behind the scenes. Concessionaires and vendors generate wastes like cardboard boxes and plastic or glass containers.
- **Areas open to the public:** Here is where event participants and the public will be asked to recycle materials like newspapers and specific beverage and food containers.
- **Event offices:** Here is where your staff will be asked to recycle office paper, newspapers, cardboard, bottles and cans.

If you decide to recycle behind the scenes, be sure that recycling bins or barrels are accessible to concessionaires and vendors only and secured to avoid contamination. Make certain that all concessionaires and vendors and their employees know about the recycling program and where bins or barrels are located. It should be as easy for them to recycle as it is to throw things away.

If event participants and the public are going to recycle, be sure that recycling bins or barrels are readily available and easily accessible. Locate clearly labeled recycling bins or barrels close to trash receptacles near concession areas, rest rooms, entrances, and exits and make sure they are clearly marked. Consider signs, color and style to mark the difference between trash and recycling containers.

If you will be recycling in office areas, educate your staff on what should and should not be recycled and label recycling receptacles clearly.

It may be useful to staff recycling "stations" with volunteers to assist the public the first year of your recycling program. Whatever method you use, be sure to monitor the recycling barrels or bins. Usually it is not recyclables in the trash that cause problems, but trash in the recycling bin.

2. Work with garbage and recycling haulers



Many events have access to recycling services through the property where the event is held. Work with property owners/managers and maintenance staff to learn about existing recycling procedures on site. If your event will be held on a property without existing recycling services, contact your local recycling program for assistance in choosing a hauler.

Once you have a hauler selected, work with them to determine a plan for which recyclables will be collected and how those recyclables will be managed. The following issues should be discussed with your hauler and written into your contract with the hauler:

- **How many bins or barrels will be needed for trash and recycling and who will supply them? Where will they be located?**
- **Who is responsible for emptying trash and recycling containers? How often and where will they be emptied?**
- **Where will dumpsters (and animal waste sites) be located? How often will they be emptied? What time of day?**
- **How will special wastes be managed?**



Animal waste

Special events featuring livestock can generate a large amount of animal waste in the form of manure and animal bedding. These materials are highly reusable either composted or spread on farm fields. Contact your local agricultural agent for a list of farmers, private markets or compost sites to determine the best place to take animal waste. Also ask your hauler for suggestions. Make sure animal waste is stored far away from concession areas and in a location that reduces the risk of contaminating it with other trash. Work with animal exhibitors to ensure proper management.

Special wastes



Any special wastes associated with your event, such as hydraulic fluid, motor oil, tires, batteries, fluorescent bulbs and medical wastes (sharps) cannot be placed in the trash. Discuss management of these items with your hauler. Make sure everyone involved with your event clearly understands how they should handle these materials. Contact your regional DNR office for more advice.



Food waste

Anyone who has been to a special event knows they involve a lot of food. Making changes in how you serve and dispose of food can make a big change in the amount of waste at your event. Consider serving food with limited packaging or serving food buffet-style to reduce the packaging associated with individually wrapped items.

3. Work with vendors and event staff



Vendors and event staff will play a big role in the success of your event's recycling program. Let vendors and event staff know up front that recycling will be required for the event. To make sure all staff are aware of recycling policies, write contracts that clearly define how trash and recyclables will be managed. You may also want to include in your contract:

- **Who is responsible for emptying recyclables.**
- **Any penalties for failure to comply with recycling rules.**
- **Whether you are requiring vendors or others to use specific items like reusable plastic cups or others.**
- **If vendors and staff are required to train their employees on how to recycle or refill recyclables.**

4. Work with volunteers



Volunteers can be a valuable addition to your recycling program. Volunteers can help ensure recyclables end up in the right containers, educate attendees, transfer recyclables from bins to collection points and track recycling rates. If you will be using volunteers at your event, start recruiting several months ahead of time and train all volunteers in recycling procedures.

5. Event setup



Locating recycling receptacles throughout your event will help ensure the success of your event's recycling program. To maximize collection of recyclables and reduce contamination:

- **Place recycling and trash receptacles next to one another.**
- **Make recycling stations highly visible and in convenient, high-traffic areas.**
- **Label recycling and garbage receptacles with clear, specific wording and text.** Photos and images on recycling and trash containers can help people know what to throw away and what to recycle.
- **Use recycling bins that are a different color than trash bins.**
- **Use clear plastic bags for recycling containers to easily identify and remove contaminants.** Make sure bags are strong enough to carry the weight of recyclables without breaking.

6. Educate staff, volunteers and participants



Education is the key to successfully managing recyclables and solid waste at your event. Haulers, concessionaires, visitors, volunteers, maintenance/grounds people and the media all need to be made aware of your program. Here are some tips:

- **Keep your messages and directions simple.**
- **Publicize your event's waste reduction and recycling message to attendees.**
- **Appeal to peoples' concern for the environment and their civic pride to encourage participation.**
- **Clearly identify your trash and recycling containers**—use distinct colors, put signs on top and on the sides of containers and use pictures as well as words.
- **Enlist local groups or clubs to help promote and manage your program.**
- **Give a consistent recycling message throughout the event**—use the same signs and colors at all sites and use recycled materials in your brochures, posters, cups, etc.
- **If recycling cannot be done at every location trash is collected, post a sign giving the location of recycling stations.**
- **Remember recycling varies from community to community.** Be sure that everyone knows what you are recycling at your location.

"Offering recycling is just another way to better serve your community."

7. Promote your green event to local media and attendees



Making recycling noticeable to the public and media gives you the opportunity to promote your event. Posters, banners, stickers, cups—all could promote recycling along with your event and sponsors. Let the media know about your "green event"— they may do a special report or story. Contact your regional DNR office for more information on promoting recycling and waste reduction.

8. Recycle!



Once your event is underway, designate a central collection area for garbage and recycling where drop boxes or dumpsters are staged. This area can also serve as a check-in point for volunteers and a central location for recycling information. You may want to give your volunteers special hats or t-shirts to make them easily identifiable.

9. Evaluate your program



After your event is over, discuss recycling and waste management with your staff, concessionaires, vendors, property owners and haulers. What worked? What didn't? How can you improve the program for next year? How can you make it easier for everyone to participate?

Follow up with your hauler/recycler after the event for final weights of garbage and recycling collected. Calculate recycling rates and publicize those results to your community.

Wisconsin Business Recycling Toolkit
www.shwec.uwm.edu/recyclingtoolkit/



Wisconsin's recycling requirements apply to everyone in the state at all locations. Wisconsinites already recycle a lot at home, but do not recycle as much "away from home." The online Business Recycling Toolkit can help your business recycle more by connecting you with recyclers and recycling markets in your area.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Bureau of Waste and Materials Management/WA/5
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

For more information on away from home recycling, or to order publications, contact *DNRWasteMaterials@Wisconsin.gov* or (608) 266-2111.

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This publication is available in alternative format (large print, Braille, audiotape etc.) upon request. Please call 608/266-2111 for more information.

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Resources

For additional information on recycling in Wisconsin, contact the DNR Waste and Materials Management Program at *DNRWasteMaterials@Wisconsin.gov* or 608-266-2111.

Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin — A nonprofit association of business, government, nonprofits and trade associations. See **www.arowonline.org**. Contact AROW at *admin@arowonline.org* or (608) 843-7360.

Solid and Hazardous Waste Education Center — Provides information and technical assistance to businesses on waste reduction, recycling and pollution prevention. See **www.uwex.edu/shwec/**. Contact SHWEC at *shwec-help@uwm.edu.*

WasteCap Resources, Inc. — A nonprofit dedicated to providing waste reduction and recycling assistance for the benefit of business and the environment. See **www.wastecap.org**. Contact WasteCap at *wastecap@wastecap.org* or (414) 961-1100 or (608) 245-1100.

Wisconsin Business Recycling Toolkit — A toolkit for commercial, business, institutions and other away from home recycling. See **www.shwec.uwm.edu/recyclingtoolkit/**.

Wisconsin Recycling Markets Directory — A detailed listing of a wide variety of recycling contractors and haulers located throughout the state. See **www.wisconsinrecyclingdirectory.com**.



DNR recycling signage. Contact the DNR to use these images for your business.