



Special Events Waste Reduction Guide



Special events may be large or small, but one thing they have in common is trash generation. An attendee at a special event can generate as much as three pounds of waste. Whether you are planning a workshop, festival, street fair, concert, sports event, fund-raising event, conference, or other activity, your event can benefit from recycling and waste reduction planning. The recycling, composting, and other tips in this guide can be used for any size event.

Why Reduce Event Waste?

- ✓ *Economics.* Recycling and composting reduce waste and disposal costs. They also support the regional economy by creating job opportunities.
- ✓ *Help the Environment.* Recycling and composting divert waste from landfills, helping western Massachusetts conserve our limited landfill space. Recycling saves natural resources and energy. It helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from landfills and power generation.
- ✓ *It's the Law.* Massachusetts bans cardboard, beverage containers and other recyclables from being disposed in the garbage. All Franklin County towns have mandatory recycling ordinances.
- ✓ *Improve Public Relations.* "Greening" your event creates a positive image and enhances the event profile.

Getting Started with Recycling



1. Designate a recycling coordinator or committee.

Event organizers must make a strong commitment to recycling for it to be successful. Planning for recycling should start at the beginning of your general event planning. Perhaps a local resident or a special interest group would be willing to coordinate recycling at your event. It's important to have at least one person responsible for coordinating recycling efforts.

2. Determine what to collect.

Identify the largest volume wastes generated at your event and determine which ones are recyclable in your area. At most events this will be cardboard and beverage containers (such as water, soda, and sports drink bottles). Some events might consider recycling steel cans if they are generated. Redeemable containers may also be part of your recycling stream. Workshops and conferences are likely to generate a lot of office paper for recycling. Involve the vendors/concessionaires for your event in this process. Ask them what types of waste they will generate at your event.

3. Decide where the recyclables will go and how they will be transported.

➤ Determine how garbage is hauled away from the event. Check with the garbage hauler to see if they can haul recyclables as well. Determine the costs of contracting with a hauler to provide recycling collection. (See Step 4 below.)

➤ Check with your town to determine if recyclables from your special event can be placed in the recycling bins at the town transfer station (if there is a drop-off center). If so, arrange for vehicles and individuals to haul recyclables to the transfer station, or identify a local individual who is willing to haul recyclables to the transfer station for a small fee. The Solid Waste District may be able to identify a small, local company that you can hire.



➤ If the event managers handle garbage removal, discuss recycling options with them, prior to signing any use contracts. What trash and recycling services do they provide? Do they provide containers? Will they arrange for pickup at the end of your event, or do you? Do they provide staffing? What are the costs? Work with maintenance people, if appropriate, to ensure recyclables are placed in proper containers for recycling.

➤ Consider separating Massachusetts redeemable containers from other collected beverage containers. Revenue from redeemable containers can offset recycling costs.

4. Research private hauler options.

If you plan to contract for recycling hauling, consider the following issues:

➤ What recyclables does the hauler accept?

➤ What type and how many recycling containers will they provide?

➤ Where will dumpsters and recycling bins be located? How often will they be emptied? Does the hauler have a preferred staging/ storage area? What time of day? Coordinate collection points and times with the hauler in advance of the event. You do not want a large truck driving through your event while attendees are present.

➤ Where will the recyclables be taken for processing? Haulers may benefit from recycling revenues, so be sure these revenues are factored into hauling costs.

➤ Require that weight slips for trash and recycling tonnages are included with the hauler's bill.

➤ Factor in the potential tonnage diverted by recycling and waste reduction when you determine disposal costs. This savings on disposal may help fund recycling efforts.

➤ Seek sponsorship for the recycling efforts or allow businesses to purchase "ad space" (signage) on garbage and recycling containers to offset hauling costs. Offer sponsorship benefits (advertising, signage, etc.) if the hauler donates any services.

5. Choose recycling containers.

➤ The Franklin County Solid Waste District loans recycling containers for special events in District towns through a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. There is no cost to borrow these containers. They are designed to collect bottles/cans or paper. Contact the District at (413) 772-2438 or by email at info@franklincountywastedistrict.org for information on how to borrow them.



➤ Recycling blue bins can be used successfully for event recycling. They provide easy recognition as recycling containers. With clear signage, they can be used for recyclable paper, bottles and cans, or redeemable containers.

➤ Wheeled carts can be used for recyclable waste, but they get very heavy and difficult to move if they are over-filled. They should not be used at sites that are uneven or can become muddy.



➤ Regular trash receptacles can be retrofitted for recycling. To reduce unwanted trash, your recycling containers must have a cover with holes about four (4) inches in diameter. If using barrels, lids can be made out of wood or even cardboard. Hold an art contest to decorate the containers.

➤ Make sure the recycling containers are a different shape and/or color than trash cans used at the event.

6. Set up for recycling containers.

➤ Use separate recycling collection containers for bottles/cans and for paper.

➤ Clearly label recycling containers with big, bright, and easy-to-read signs on top and sides. Have signs at eye-level, if possible. Clearly indicate which materials must be deposited into which containers. Keep instructions simple, such as "Empty Beverage Containers ONLY." Durable signs may cost more initially, but can be reused year after year.

➤ Line large containers or wheeled carts with the correct size and strength plastic bags. Consider the weight of the materials being collected to determine the thickness of bags to purchase. For heavy materials, bags should be heavyweight plastic. Contractor bags work well. For light materials such as plastic bottles and aluminum cans, medium weight (15 ml) bags are sufficient.

➤ Use bags that are large enough to fit over the top of the collection bins. Place extra empty bags at the bottom of the containers for easy replacement. Secure the top of the bags to the container with tape if necessary (use colored tape if desired for appearance), or gather and tie the loose corners of the bag to make a tight fit over the container.

- Promote recycling with banners or flags of different colors to direct people to the recycling stations. Make the recycling message consistent throughout the event—use the same message and colors at recycling stations as on brochures and posters.
- Keep the recycling stations neat and clean. Have volunteers monitor sites. Inspect sites regularly and remove full bags so that receptacles do not overflow.

7. Determine recycling container placement.

- Make it convenient for event attendees to recycle! Establish “recycling stations” in the following locations:
 - Next to all trash cans, if possible. Attendees are unlikely to go out of their way to recycle if a trash can is more convenient than a recycling container. Do not place recycling bins without a trash can next to them or they will likely be contaminated with trash.
 - In high traffic areas, including primary exits.
 - In vendor and concession areas in a location that does not intrude on vendor serving areas.
- Large events may require a site plan with a visual map of recycling stations.
- Designate a “staging area” to store full bags of recyclables until they can be removed at the end of your event. Larger events may need two or more designated staging areas. If garbage is also being stored for later hauling, be sure to designate a separate area for recyclables. Use different color bags or clear bags for recycling.
- When establishing the recycling stations, consider the distance from the “staging areas” or storage areas. Bags may be heavy and may also leak, so recycling stations should be as near to the staging or storage areas as possible. If the ground is level, consider using wheeled carts for transporting recyclables from each station to the staging area.
- If a hauler is providing a large recycling container (such as a “roll-off” container), identify it with signage and have the container placed conveniently so that volunteer recyclers have easy access for placing recyclables into it.

8. Implement the recycling program.

- **Set-up.** If the event area is secure, set up recycling stations the day before. Place bags in the recycling containers. If set-up is to be the day of the event, start early to make sure all stations are in place, bags in containers, signs and banners in place.
- **Volunteer/Staff training.**
 - Review the logistics for the event, including check-in location and time, the materials being collected for recycling, the locations of collection containers, their assigned recycling station(s), where the full bags of recyclables go for storage, where cardboard goes for storage.
 - Practice safety. Gloves should be worn at all times when handling recyclables. Do not stick hands inside a container to press down on the

recyclables. Carefully remove trash from recycling bins. Lift using legs, not back and do not lift more weight than is easy.

- Wasps may be attracted to the recycling containers, depending on the time of year. Be sure to ask volunteers if they are allergic to bee or wasp stings. *Volunteers with wasp or bee allergies should not participate in the recycling collection process.* Volunteers need to always look for stinging insects before putting their hands inside a recycling collection container or picking up a full bag.

➤ **Managing the recycling stations.**

- Volunteers should take the opportunity to talk about recycling with event attendees, encourage them to recycle, and show them what they can recycle at the event.
- Monitor the recycling stations. Keep them clean and neat. Make sure signage is still in place.
- Provide volunteers or staff with good quality gloves. Provide either a hand washing area or wipes.
- If trash is in a recycling container, carefully remove it in order to discourage attendees from placing more trash in the containers. If the recycling container is completely contaminated with trash, remove the bag, and place a new bag in the recycling container. The contaminated recycling bag should be put in the trash at the staging/storage area so participants don't see recyclables mixed in with trash cans.
- Collect cardboard from vendors. Flatten boxes and store in designated location or staging area.
- Large events should have wheeled carts, wheelbarrows, golf carts, or other means to haul collected recyclables to the staging/storage area.

➤ **Event clean up.**

- At multi-day events, plan to have enough volunteers to help with the recycling after vendors leave, when volumes of trash and recycling may be highest.
- Assign volunteers to specific event clean-up areas.
- Have volunteers systematically remove all bags of recyclables to designated areas.
- Count the number of trash, recycling, and compost bags (bins or boxes) to compare the volume of each generated at your special event.

9. Recycling program follow up.

- Calculate volumes or tonnages of total waste generated, disposed, and recycled. Request copies of weight slips for trash and recycling from private haulers.
- Get feedback on successes and problems from volunteers, vendors, and contractors/haulers.
- Identify potential improvements and modify your recycling efforts for the next event.
- Send out a news release with statistics on how much was recycled.
- Send thank you letters or Certificates of Appreciation to waste reduction sponsors along with copies of any news articles or event materials in which they are credited.

For assistance with special event recycling and to borrow recycling containers, contact the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District at 413-772-2438. Hearing-impaired individuals can use the MA Relay at 711 or TTY/TDD access at 1-800-439-2370. The Solid Waste District is an equal opportunity provider.

This document was made possible by a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. For general recycling information, compost facility information, solid waste regulations and other waste reduction information, visit www.mass.gov/dep/recycle.

Getting Started with Composting

Collecting paper and food waste for composting is crucial to maximizing waste reduction at special events. The steps to successfully diverting compostable waste are similar to recycling at your event.



1. Designate a composting coordinator or committee.

Event organizers must make a strong commitment to composting for it to be successful. Planning for composting event waste should start at the beginning of your general event planning. It is important to have at least one person responsible for coordinating composting efforts.

2. Identify compostable materials to be collected.

The following materials can be collected for composting:

- Food waste, napkins, paper, paper products, waxed paper, and waxed cardboard. Paper products cannot have a plastic coating.
- Biodegradable flatware and dishware. These have the look and utility of plastic, but degrade within two months in most compost piles.
- Livestock manure and bedding. You can arrange to have manure and bedding taken directly to a local farm for composting. Be sure to store animal waste away from concession areas. Work with animal exhibitors to ensure proper management.

Events in permanent locations, such as fairgrounds, may consider composting food and animal wastes on-site. Contact the Solid Waste District for information on state permit requirements and necessary logistics for managing the compost area.

3. Decide where the compostable material will go and how it will get there.

➤ Contact a local farmer or commercial composting operation who may be willing to accept the materials for composting. Don't know who to ask? Check with local or regional farmer's markets, CISA (Communities Involved in Sustaining Agriculture) at 413- 665-7100 or the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources website at www.mass.gov/agr/programs/compost. Verify the compostable materials they will accept. Are paper products okay? Waxed cardboard? Meat scraps and bones?

Verify with the farmer/composter what type of bags they accept at their facility. In most cases, regular plastic bags are not accepted because they do not biodegrade, can tangle in equipment, and ruin the quality of the finished compost product. The Solid Waste District has a limited supply of starch-based, biodegradable bags available for the first time a special event composts waste.

➤ Arrange for pick up of the compost or ask for volunteers to haul compost to the designated composting facility. If possible, park a pick-up truck on site for storage of the full compost bags. Compost materials are heavy, so limited handling is preferable.

- The Solid Waste District may be able to identify a local company that you can hire to haul the compostable waste from the event to the compost site.

4. Determine what containers to use.

- Five-gallon buckets or tubs make good compost collection containers.
- Consider using waxed cardboard boxes as compost collection containers. (Check with your composter to make sure they are acceptable.) Regular cardboard boxes lined with biodegradable bags can also be used.
- The Solid Waste District has a limited number of biodegradable bags to line compost containers. These bags biodegrade rapidly in the compost process.

5. Decide compost container location and set up.

- Establish compost collection stations in the following locations:
 - Next to trash cans as part of the “recycling stations.”
 - In the concession/food vendor area(s).
 - In high traffic areas, including primary exits.
 - With food vendors for their use during food preparation.
- Label compost containers clearly. Consider listing what items can go into the containers since participants might not know what is acceptable for your compost program.
- Have volunteers monitor compost collection containers regularly so that receptacles do not overflow.
- Before the event starts designate an area to store full bags or containers of compostables until they can be shipped to the compost facility or farm. Make sure compost materials are secure against animal intrusion. Larger events may need two or more areas designated for storage of full bags or containers.
- Be sure to keep compost bags separate from garbage and recyclables, if left in a staging area for later hauling. Label each bag “compost.”
- If your event is to last more than one day, compost materials should be removed from each location at the end of the day and secured in a building or dumpster to prevent animals from getting into them. Collection containers should be cleaned each day.



6. Implement the composting program.

- **Set-up.** If the event area is secure, set up composting stations the day before. If set-up is to be the day of the event, start early to make sure all stations are in place, bags in containers, signs and banners in place.
- **Volunteer/Staff training.**
 - Review the logistics for the event, including check-in location and time, the materials being collected for composting, the locations of collection containers,

their assigned composting station(s), and where the full containers of compostables go for storage.

- Practice safety. Gloves should be worn at all times when handling compostables. Do not stick hands inside a container to press down on the compostables. Carefully remove trash from collection containers. Lift using legs, not back and do not lift more weight than is easy.
- Wasps may be attracted to the composting containers, depending on the time of year. Be sure to ask volunteers if they are allergic to bee or wasp stings. *Volunteers with wasp or bee allergies should not participate in the composting collection process.* Volunteers need to always look for stinging insects before putting their hands inside a collection container or picking up a full container.

➤ **Managing the composting stations.**

- Volunteers should take the opportunity to talk about composting with event attendees, encourage them to compost food and paper waste, and show them what they can separate for composting at the event.
- Monitor the composting stations. Keep them clean and neat. Make sure signage is still in place.
- Provide volunteers or staff with good quality gloves. Provide either a hand washing area or wipes.
- If trash is in a composting containers, carefully remove it in order to discourage attendees from placing more trash in the containers. If the composting container is completely contaminated with trash the contents should be put in the trash at the staging/storage area.
- Large events should have wheeled carts, wheelbarrows, golf carts, or other means to haul collected compostables to the staging/storage area.

**Local Heroes
Garlic and Arts Festival**

At the 2005 Garlic and Arts Festival in Orange, only two bags of garbage were generated during the two day festival, with 8,000 attendees! Vendors used paper cups and plates, along with compostable cups and glasses made from biodegradable starch. Food waste and serviceware were composted at the Seeds of Solidarity Farm. Cardboard and other beverage containers were recycled.

➤ **Event clean up.**

- At multi-day events, plan to have enough volunteers to help with the composting after vendors leave, when volumes may be highest.
- Assign volunteers to specific event clean-up areas.
- Have volunteers systematically remove all bags of compostables to designated areas.
- Count the number of trash, recycling, and compost bags (bins or boxes) to compare the volume of each generated at your special event.

7. Composting event follow up

- Calculate volumes or tonnages of total waste generated, disposed, and composted. Request copies of weight slips for trash and compost from private haulers.

- Get feedback on successes and problems from volunteers, vendors, and contractors/haulers.
- Identify potential improvements and modify your composting efforts for the next event.
- Send out a news release with statistics on how much was collected for composting.
- Send thank you letters or Certificates of Appreciation to waste reduction sponsors along with copies of any news articles or event materials in which they are credited.
- Arrange to use the finished compost produced from your event at next year's event, either in on-site planting areas or by giving it to event attendees. Create educational signs for areas where the compost is used or labels for the bags of compost given to attendees.

For assistance with special event composting and to use compostable bags, contact the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District at 413-772-2438. Hearing-impaired individuals can use the MA Relay at 711 or TTY/TDD access at 1-800-439-2370. The Solid Waste District is an equal opportunity provider.

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Working with Volunteers at Special Events



Volunteers are essential to the success of your recycling and composting efforts. Volunteers can be any age (with adult supervision as needed).

- Solicit volunteers from local environmental groups, recreational groups, youth groups, church groups, scout troops, and school groups. Volunteer groups that help your event reduce waste gain community recognition and can have a positive influence on the experience that attendees bring away from the event.
- Encourage participation as a volunteer by offering free event passes, t-shirts, free or discounted concessions, or other promotions, such as reusable beverage cups/mugs or recycled canvas bags.
- There should be enough volunteers throughout the day(s) to monitor all of the waste reduction stations. Ideally each station would have a volunteer at it. But if not enough volunteers are available, assign several stations to each volunteer. *It is a lot easier to have a volunteer stand at each recycling/composting station during the event, than it is to have to sort out trash from the collected recyclables and compost after the event!*
- Large events should provide recycling/composting station maps to volunteers.

Working with Vendors/Concessionaires to Reduce Waste

- Start communicating early so that vendors have time to plan accordingly to meet your waste reduction strategy and plans.
- Provide all vendors with an information sheet about your recycling and composting efforts in advance of the event, such as with their registration packet. Attached to this guide is a sample waste reduction tip sheet for vendors.
- In any additional contacts made to vendors, reinforce the benefits to vendors of participating in a waste-conscious event and what is expected of them.
- Make recycling (and composting, if appropriate) a required part of their contract for the event. Clearly state how recycling will be done at the event and the responsibilities of the vendor. For example, will they be required to use only recyclable and compostable containers? flatten cardboard boxes? take all packaging waste with them, such as bread trays?
- Ask vendors what they plan on serving at the event. Work with them to figure out “no waste” options and least packaging ideas for the items they will be bringing. Encourage vendors to make their role in the event as waste-free as possible.



- Require vendors to haul away their own garbage. This will encourage them to recycle and compost fully!
- Contact a rendering company to remove grease from concessionaires or require concessionaires to haul it away for proper handling.
- Work with vendors to ensure that any special wastes, such as hydraulic fluid, motor oil, and batteries are handled properly. Contact the Solid Waste District at 413-772-2438 for information on proper disposal.

1. Recycling

- Ask or require vendors to sell beverages in recyclable containers only (aluminum, plastic, or glass bottles). Glass bottles will make recycling bins/bags heavy. Ask vendors not to use plastic or Styrofoam cups because they can't be recycled.
- At vendor set-up have the recycling coordinator and/or volunteers visit each vendor booth to remind them to break down cardboard and set it aside for pick-up by volunteers.
- Provide recycling collection containers and a collection system for vendor use.
- Monitor vendor compliance throughout the event and remind them of the importance of recycling.
- Award vendors (with ribbons, prizes) who participate correctly in the recycling program throughout the event, especially those who do an outstanding job. This helps build support and enthusiasm for recycling at the event, and can also help spread the practice at other events attended by the same vendors.

2. Composting

- Ask or require vendors to use paper and biodegradable service-ware. The easiest way to get vendor cooperation is for your event committee to purchase biodegradable service-ware and sell it directly to the vendors. See the section on "Additional Resources" for purchase information. Alternatively, require vendors to purchase biodegradable items on their own.
- Encourage vendors to avoid individual packages of condiments and consider using refillable pump containers.
- Provide composting collection containers and a collection system for vendor use.
- Monitor vendor compliance throughout the event and remind them of the importance of composting.
- Award vendors (with ribbons, prizes) who participate correctly in the composting program throughout the event, especially those who do an outstanding job. This helps build support and enthusiasm for composting at the event, and can also help spread the practice at other events attended by the same vendors.



Promoting Waste Reduction

- Include a message about your waste reduction efforts in all publicity for your event. Use every opportunity to publicize your recycling and/or composting efforts:
 - Event advertising
 - Radio station ads and public service announcements
 - Web pages
 - Local newspapers
 - Outdoor signs
- Include information about your waste reduction efforts in pre-registration packets for participants in events such as fairs, animal shows, and road races.
- Promote recycling, composting, and litter clean-up in event programs/guides and during announcements.



Other "Green" Event Ideas

- If vendors will be dispensing drinks "on tap" consider selling event souvenir cups for use by attendees. Encourage or require attendees to purchase the cups for beverages. Offer a discount on drinks when the souvenir cup is used. Provide a special bin for collection of the cups if attendees do not want to take them home.
- Print flyers and invitations on recycled paper (minimum of 30% post-consumer content) or "alternative" tree-free paper.
- Print banners or signs that can be used year after year.
- If you can't reuse materials (decorations, signs, art supplies and materials), donate them to schools or art organizations.
- Consider donating non-perishable, unopened food to food banks, soup kitchens, or shelters.

Sample Vendor Waste Reduction Tip Sheet

We are proud to announce that our event this year will include a waste reduction effort. We will be providing convenient recycling and composting services for participants and vendors. To help us, we ask that you plan to flatten any cardboard boxes that you generate and set them aside. Volunteers will collect cardboard boxes from your booth for recycling. Please place your empty food and beverage containers in the conveniently located recycling containers (next to each garbage receptacle). [Place compostable food and paper waste in the labeled compost collection containers provided to you.]

In order to reduce contamination in our recycling and composting containers all vendors are asked to assist in the following ways:

- ✓ Please do not to use Styrofoam (polystyrene) and other nonrecyclable plastics.
- ✓ Please serve beverages in aluminum cans and plastic bottles. Glass bottles are acceptable but not preferred because of their weight.
- ✓ Please use paper plates, paper cups, and biodegradable utensils.
- ✓ Please consider selling food that requires minimal serving containers (such as just a paper plate or napkin).
- ✓ Instead of individual packages of condiments (sugar, ketchup, cream, mustard, etc.), please use a refillable pump condiment dispenser or recyclable containers.
- ✓ Please use wooden coffee stirrers.
- ✓ Please do not provide straws.
- ✓ Consider using refillable souvenir cups. Event attendees can purchase the cup and receive refills at a discount price.

Sample Press Release Special Event Waste Reduction

Contact:
Date:
For Immediate Release

_____ Fair Promotes Waste Reduction

The _____ Fair is promoting waste reduction at its annual event on Fair organizers have made a commitment to creating less trash by supplying recycling

[and compost] containers for participants to use while enjoying the fair.

Participants will be able to recycle beverage containers in specially designed collection containers. The collection containers will be located next to trash cans and in the food vendor area. Signs will instruct participants about what can be recycled.

[Participants will also be able to separate leftover food waste and paper products from the fair. Specially labeled containers will be set up on the fairgrounds for food and paper waste. Signs will instruct participants about what can be placed in these containers. The food and paper waste will be sent to where it will be composted.]

Fair organizers expect to reduce the amount of trash generated at the fair by X%. Waste reduction will not only save money but conserves energy and natural resources through recycling [and composting].

Volunteers to help monitor the recycling [and composting] program are always needed. If you are interested in helping please contact.....

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Additional Resources*

- Businesses that offer biodegradable products:
 - Mansfield Paper, Springfield, MA – (800) 225-2641
 - Biocorp – www.biocorpaavc.com
 - Nat-Ur, Inc: plastic compostable cups made with cornstarch – www.cereplast.com
 - Earthware Biodegradables offers non-GMO wheat-based and corn-based cutlery products – www.earthwarebiodegradables.com

- Options for composting
 - Bob Martin’s Farm, Greenfield: (413) 774-5631
 - Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA): (413) 665-7100. CISA may be able to provide farmer contacts in your area.
 - Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources – www.mass.gov/agr/programs/compost

- Franklin County Solid Waste District: (413) 772-2438 for a list of recycling and solid waste haulers.

- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection for solid waste regulations, compost facilities, business and general recycling information – www.mass.gov/dep/recycle

* This list is not an endorsement of the vendors by the Solid Waste District. This list may change without notice.



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