

Simple Steps Toward Making Your Event Zero Waste

Your effort supports U-M's waste reduction goal:

Reduce landfill waste by 40% by 2025



Each day there are dozens of events on campus which create an enormous amount of waste. With a bit of thoughtful planning, much of that waste can be reduced, recycled, or composted.

The Zero Waste Events Program is here to help.

Planning the Event

- Request compost collection receptacles, service, liners, and signage if needed (students are also eligible for free compostable tableware) by emailing zerowaste@umich.edu.
- Make an accurate estimate of attendees to minimize food waste and cut costs. This is the most important step for reducing waste. If you do have leftovers, is there a way for you to share them after the event? (Such as placing in a break room or letting guests take excess cookies on the way out.)
- Familiarize yourself with what is compostable or recyclable at ocs.umich.edu/where-to-throw or email us.
- Consider ordering menu items that typically generate less waste, such as sandwich platters instead of boxed lunches, whole fruit, bulk chips instead of individual bags, infused water dispensers instead of bottled drinks, etc. Also consider low-carbon menu items to reduce your environmental impact even more.
- Know the waste capacity of your event location. Does it have compost receptacles available? Will you need to have additional compost, recycling, or landfill receptacles placed to handle the waste generated? If you need more, email us.
- Will someone on your team or the caterer take the collected compost out to the compost cart, or does your venue perform this service? We can give you a map to the compost cart, order additional service for the building if needed, and more.
- If you have a large or open house-style event, identify and train volunteers to staff each waste station to reduce compost contamination. Office of Campus Sustainability may be able to provide support via our student intern team.
- Avoid waste by promoting the event electronically. Choose digital options for sharing materials. For instance, ask presenters to share materials electronically instead of printing copies.
- Consider using reusable decorations or decorations that can be taken home as favors (e.g. small plant centerpieces that can be taken home by guests).

Planning the Event

- Let the caterer or vendor know you are working toward a zero waste event. Please share this [guide for caterers](#) if your caterer has questions.
- If possible, use reusable dishes. If not, request Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) or CMA-W certified compostable serviceware from the caterer. Student organizations can also request free compostable serviceware from the [Zero Waste Events Program](#).
- Avoid non-compostable wrappers or accessories such as plastic-fringed toothpicks. (Recyclable packaging includes cans and plastic bottles, plastic tubs, paper board, and aseptic containers. Anything else should be a compostable version or avoided).
- Opt for bulk rather than individually packaged items (e.g. chips, cream and sugar for coffee, water, condiments).
- If ordering boxed/bagged lunches, make sure condiment packets are not included in the box. If included, these inevitably contaminate the compost.
- Specifically state plastic cutlery is not wanted.

Day of event

- Make sure compost bins or event boxes and liners are set up in your event location (and recycling and landfill if needed). In most cases, compost, recycling, and landfill boxes/bins should be placed near each other as a "waste station" to prevent contamination.
- Set out information, such as compostable ware, boxes, liners, bin and tabletop signage identifying your zero waste effort, or make an announcement. Make sure to note any possible contaminants (such as empty sugar packets) and direct guests to place them in the landfill bins.
- Ideally, have a volunteer monitor each waste station to help people place items into appropriate bins.
- Take pictures and share with us via email.
- After the event, take compost bag(s) to loading dock and place in the cart labeled Compost if you haven't arranged for someone else to do so.
- If applicable, keep decorations, leftover serviceware, and cardboard collection boxes for reuse.