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Best Management Practices for Special Event Waste & Recycling Activities

Planning for Success

As with all aspects of an event, it is helpful to have a clear plan for special event recycling & waste management. The number of attendees and the event location will have a direct bearing on the possible scale and scope for planning the waste management and recycling activities. It is important to start thinking about what to do at the beginning of the event planning process (e.g., site layout, vendor outreach, budgeting, and public relations efforts). A written plan will help to ensure that implementation goes smoothly, and will be essential if the task of program coordination is transferred to a different person. For promoting the event's recycling efforts, have signage to describe the recycling efforts being implemented, how attendees and vendors can participate, and communicate the benefits of recycling in the community.

Understanding Existing Conditions

A critical step in the planning process is to have a good understanding of the amount of waste that will be generated the composition of that waste. Some basic questions to ask at the outset are listed below:

- How much waste is typically generated at the event (in weight or volume)?
- What's the composition and amounts of the waste?" This is important to know what number and type of containers and staffing you may need for the event.
- Who manages and hauls waste in the jurisdiction where the event will be held?
- What types of trash and recycling containers can be used and who provides them?
- What are the waste-related costs for trash and recycling containers, hauling, disposal, recycling, and labor (either in dollars or volunteer time)?
- What materials can be recycled?

- What recycling opportunities exist in the community?
- Are there local organizations, agencies, or individuals that might be interested in supporting the event?

Organizing Program Details

Getting Commitment from Top to Bottom

The key ingredients to a successful waste & recycling program are to have a plan (it need not be complex), and the full support of the event leaders and staff. Some positive attributes of a well organized waste & recycling plan include:

- The event is a community showcase and an important forum to demonstrate environmental leadership.
- A well-planned waste management & recycling program can help to reduce costs, while improving the environment, and creating a positive image for the event.
- If the event generates a lot of waste, much of it can be reused, reduced or recycled.
- Recycling at special events can also be used as an educational opportunity to engage the public.

Some common questions that are useful to anticipate include:

- Why hasn't recycling been part of the event in the past?
- Will recycling distract already busy staff and volunteers from the primary mission of hosting putting on a fun and well-organized event?
- How much extra time will our volunteers or staff have to spend collecting, sorting, or moving materials?
- What additional costs will there be for separate containers, place signs and perform waste collection and removal?
- Will containers create a cluttered or messy look?
- Will there be odors or nuisances?
- Consider any safety issues associated with the program.

Designating a Point Person or Steering Committee

Once there is commitment to proceed, it is important to have a point person who will create and oversee implementation of the waste & recycling plan. Ideally, the point person will have an interest in the program and have a desire to make it succeed. Be sure the point person has the resources to succeed, including: time, attention from decision makers, and commitment from the top.

In some cases, it makes sense to have a committee to help the point person identify opportunities and resources. These individuals may be part of the event organizing body, from a civic group, or a local organization or agency. Typically, the point person will need to be the driving force to make the program succeed.

Creating a Realistic Plan

Goals

- For the event to be a showcase of how waste may be managed in an environmentally responsible manner, the focus should be to reduce, reuse and recycle as many materials as economically and logistically feasible.

Program Management

- Develop a clear hierarchy of who is responsible for what types of activities.

Targeted Waste

- Cardboard boxes, paper products, organic waste and aluminum, glass, and plastic beverage containers.

Labor

- Organizers
- Sorters
- Other staff that stage or move containers and materials

Know your options. If you have a record of the amount of waste generated in past years (tons or cubic yards are the most common measurements), you are well on your way. If you don't have this information you may want to begin this type of record keeping that may be useful for planning future events.

Speak the language. By using terms common in the waste industry, you will be able to speak the industry language. The following are a few key terms to know (or questions to ask).

- **Pull Charge** (also *container charge*) is the charge for removing the dumpster.
- **Rental Fee** is the cost of using the dumpster for a specified length of time.
- **Cubic Yard** (or *yard*) is the most common unit for measuring the volume of solid waste. A cubic yard is equivalent to 202 U.S. gallons.
- **Tons** are the most common measure of weight for waste materials – a ton is equal to 2,000 pounds.
- **Density** of waste refers to the weight per unit of volume.

- **Dumpster** (also *container, box or can*) is a large container for storing trash. Dumpsters are sized by the cubic yard, and can range from 1 yard to 40 yards.
- **Carts** are wheeled containers for trash or recyclables, typically holding 60 to 100 gallons.
- **Commingled** is a term used to describe unlike recyclables collected in a single recycling bin. *Commingled containers* are often used for aluminum, plastic and glass, paper and food and beverage containers.

If you are not sure about a term, don't be afraid to ask. This will allow you to compare apples to apples, and you will know for next time.

Get price details

Ask for a breakdown of the charges-dumpster rental, removal (or pull charge), and how the fee is determined.

Understand recycling requirements

For example, is it acceptable for glass, metal, and plastic containers to be commingled, or do they need to be segregated? Know if there are any state or local landfill diversion requirements.

Know the Local Health and Sanitation Regulations

It is important to know the local health and sanitation laws and regulations and the agency that performs the enforcement of the regulations. This pertains to such things as aesthetics, overflowing trash and recycling containers, proper food handling and vector control.

Dealing with Event Vendors

Vendors are responsible for a considerable amount of waste generated at events and can play an important role in the waste & recycling program.

Strategies for vendor participation

Cardboard Recycling – Require vendors to bring flattened cardboard boxes to a central location for recycling (e.g., cardboard dumpster). Focus on the early stages of the event when most boxes are opened and emptied.

Food and Beverage Container Recycling – Provide vendors with appropriately sized recycling bins for the materials they generate, as well as for their customers. Vendors may have restaurant-size cans and jugs that can be recycled.

Grease or Cooking Oil Collection – Require vendors to empty any grease into collection containers and remove from the site in the proper manner.

Household Hazardous Waste – This type of material is typically not generated at special events but things like batteries or cleaning solutions should be removed from the site in a proper manner.

Trash Removal – Try to limit waste generated by vendors, or require that they remove all waste from the site upon departure.

Communication is the key

Be clear and consistent with all vendor communications to ensure that expectations are understood. This is particularly important if a vendor has been working at the event for a number of years and may view recycling as a new or additional responsibility.

Possible communication strategies include:

- Stipulating the recycling requirements in vendor contracts, and making sure that new requirements are visually highlighted and orally pointed out.
- Sending each vendor a letter of instruction, in advance of the event, to remind them of the requirements.
- Passing out an instructional flier at each vendor booth or include one with the vendor check-in materials.
- Asking a volunteer or staff person to speak with each vendor during set up about the program requirements and answering any logistical questions that may arise.
- Clearly labeling all recycling and waste containers and collection locations.
- Designating someone to be available for vendors to answer their questions.

Equipment and Containers

If you are purchasing your own recycling and waste containers, they can fall into several categories, and for each there is a wide range of options ranging from low or no-cost items that can be donated or using high-end specialty products.

Centralized Containers/Locations - Centralized containers are often used for garbage, and make sense for recyclable materials as well. These containers are not intended for use by the public, but are for staff, volunteers, and vendors for staging purposes. They may also include dumpsters or containers for cardboard boxes, and centralized areas or containers for storing bags of recyclable cans and bottles, as well as wood waste such as pallets. It is important to make sure these materials are picked up and removed in a timely manner, so they don't become unsightly.

Cans or Bins for Attendees - Ideally, there will be clearly marked recycling and waste cans (e.g., for bottles and cans, and paper) located next to every garbage can for attendees to use. At a minimum, there should be recycling containers for beverage containers located in the areas where most drinks are served and consumed, as well as at the entrances and exits. Recycling containers for paper such program fliers are also effective when placed

near the exits. The goal is to make recycling easily accessible and convenient to encourage attendees' full participation.

Signage and Communication

Recycling and waste containers must be clearly marked, and should have a unique look, readily distinguishing them. Signage should be visible, legible, durable, rain-proof, and if possible, reusable for next year.

Staff and Volunteers

During the planning process, determine how many people will be needed to implement the program. Conversely, if there is a set number of staff, think about how best to use their time. The goal is to integrate recycling efforts with garbage collection and management so it doesn't require extra staff or volunteer hours.

It is critical that all staff and volunteers be educated and trained on their roles and tasks, including what materials are unacceptable with recyclables. Potential roles for staff and volunteers include:

- Acquiring or preparing recycling containers (e.g., transporting, buying, removing from storage, painting, fixing, etc.);
- Placing containers around event grounds prior to start of event;
- Emptying full containers into a cart (or removing full bags and replacing with empty bags) and delivering to central storage location;
- Transporting recyclables to a recycling center or other location;
- Flattening all cardboard boxes before placing in bin
- Cleaning, returning, or storing containers at end of event;
- Helping vendors comply with the recycling program, and
- Tracking the amount of waste and recyclables generated.

Some possible sources of volunteers include:

- Recycling groups,
- Civic groups,
- Church groups,
- Youth groups,
- Municipal recycling committee,
- Local solid waste agency and State recycling organizations such as the California Conservation Corps.

As with other aspects of special events in which volunteers are used, it is important to:

- Have reasonable expectations of volunteers, especially if they want to attend the event;
- Confirm all volunteer commitments before the start of the event;
- Recognize that volunteers sometimes do not show up and plan accordingly. As a general rule, it is best to recruit more volunteers than needed for the day;
- Thank volunteers each day and ask if they will come back the next day;
- Recognize the value of partnerships established in support of these events.

Leveraging Partnerships

You don't have to be alone in implementing the waste & recycling plan. Many types of entities share an interest in establishing and supporting recycling at special events, and may be able to help. To maximize the potential that these organizations offer, it is important to be creative, contact them early in the planning process, and think about what assistance is needed. For example:

Fair Associations may be interested in helping to organize workshops at their conferences to discuss recycling opportunities at special events.

Local businesses may be interested in helping to underwrite a recycling effort, or provide or loan recycling bins and signage.

Recycling organizations are often interested in recruiting volunteers for a recycling program and in providing recycling educational materials, and information at a booth or for an event publication.

Reuse and second hand stores may be interested in gleaning any items that can be donated for reuse.

Recycling businesses, such as curbside recycling collectors, cardboard recyclers, or redemption centers may help to provide free or discounted services or containers as a promotional activity.

State and local recycling agencies may offer technical support, equipment, or grant money to help special events run recycling programs.

Event Management and Evaluation

Set Up

The days before the event are key times to hammer out last minute details, prepare materials, remind staff and volunteers of their roles, and confirm arrangements with vendors and waste haulers. A few items to put on your check list for the days leading up to the event include:

- Confirm delivery and pickup times and locations of dumpsters and other containers with hauler.
- Review trash and recycling handling logistics with staff.
- Contact volunteers, or volunteer coordinators.
- Inventory containers, signs, and other materials.
- Remind vendors, as they set up about their responsibilities for recycling and waste management.

Publicity and Education

Special events provide a rich opportunity for promoting the event's environmental and sustainability leadership. This opportunity should not go unused! Plan an educational and informational campaign for the public, well in advance of the event. Here are a few suggestions for publicity and education:

- Write and distribute press releases about the event (before and/or after) to local press.

- Involve local recycling program and staff in this effort.
- Involve the hauler selected to provide removal and recycling services.
- Set up booths at the event to promote recycling activities in the community and at the event. These booths may be staffed by recycling organizations.
- Display signage and posters around the event to help encourage and inform vendors and participants about what they can recycle and where.
- Post information about the event's recycling on the event's or town's website.
- Develop event brochures with details on the event's recycling efforts and opportunities for vendors and participants to recycle.

During the Event

Like other aspects of special events, once the event begins, it has a life of its own and making major changes to plans are difficult. However, some variables (e.g., weather, turnout, and absent volunteers or staff) may affect the program on the day of the event, and being on top of details is important.

- Have a roster indicating who is to do what, where, and when.
- Have a walkie-talkie, phone, or a contact place so staff, volunteers, and vendors may easily speak with the lead person.
- Walk around the event periodically, checking on how full garbage and recycling cans are, litter problems, whether signs are in place, and other logistics--constantly manage the flow of trash and recyclables. If need be, relocate containers (let others know of any changes) or signs.
- Check on dumpsters and recycling containers to see that they are being used correctly. Notify vendors, staff or volunteers if there is a noticeable problem (e.g., garbage in the cardboard bin, or lots of cans and bottles in the garbage).

After the Event

- Collect and store reusable signs.
- Document the amount of garbage sent out (get data from hauler) and the amount of recyclables recovered (estimates from staff or volunteers or data from haulers).
- Evaluate how "clean" the recyclables were, and how free of recyclables the trash was. This will provide information for developing future strategies to improve recycling or to change the number and size of containers and signage for the waste & recycling plan.
- Identify additional target materials to reduce, reuse, or recycle in the future.
- Discuss recycling and waste management efforts with staff, vendors, property owners, and haulers. What worked? What didn't? How can the program be improved for next year? How can it be easier for everyone to participate? What were the costs or savings?
- Thank everyone for his or her participation, especially the volunteers!