



**SAN RAFAEL**  
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

# Zero Waste Event Guide



## Zero Waste Background

Here in the City of San Rafael, every event we host, from casual lunch meetings to city-wide parties, should be a Zero Waste event. This webpage serves as a guideline for planning and executing your next Zero Waste event.

Zero Waste is a practice of keeping as much material as possible out of landfills. Some of the ways that we achieve Zero Waste are by composting, recycling, using reusable products instead of single-use, and reducing consumption wherever possible. Some amount of waste can be unavoidable, especially when hosting events for a large group of people. However, by working together, planning ahead, and purchasing responsibly, we can successfully decrease our waste production across the board. Zero Waste has many benefits beyond just diverting waste from landfill. Zero Waste practices often use less energy and other resources, saving us money in the long term.

## Relevant Laws and Ordinances

### **SB 1383**

The statewide climate pollutant reduction law requires businesses and individuals to divert all organics from landfill to be composted, avoiding unnecessary emissions and creating useful compost products.

Three-stream waste sorting must be provided (garbage, compost, and recycling) and must be clearly labeled, appropriately and accessibly located, and the three bins must be placed together in a group. SB 1383 additionally requires that we as a jurisdiction only purchase paper products with a minimum post-consumer recycled content (30% for most paper products).

### **Reusable Foodware Ordinance**

San Rafael adopted a Reusable Foodware Ordinance (RFO) in 2022. All foodware must be reusable or 100% compostable to comply with the ordinance. This is a great framework for us as city employees when planning and purchasing for an event. Also remember that polystyrene foam (Styrofoam) products are never allowed in the City of San Rafael.

# Before the Event

A successful Zero Waste event starts well before the date of the event itself with careful, thoughtful planning and preparation. This section will lead you through some of the major categories you will need to consider as you plan your event.

## Material Needs

Start by thinking about the type of event you are having and what your material needs will be. Will you be serving food at the event? Hot drinks? In the sections below, learn about reusable, compostable, and recyclable options.

### Reusable

If you will be having food at your event, consider whether reusable foodware is an option. The sustainability department can provide reusable silverware for events up to 200 people. For smaller, office-based events, encourage attendees to bring their own cups and plates. You may even have enough cups and plates already in the office to use. Check the cupboards in your break room! For large events, compostable foodware may be the best option.

### Identify Compostable and Recyclable Materials

Once you have planned for as many reusable options as you can accommodate, it's time to think about the rest of your materials. Remember, all non-reusable foodware must be 100% compostable. Use [this tool](#) from Marin County to identify compostable options for all of your foodware needs.

If you will be serving coffee or other hot drinks, note that there is currently no compostable option for disposable cups. We strongly recommend encouraging attendees to bring their own reusable cups for this purpose. For small events in the office, check your break room for mugs and cups and plan to wash them after the event.

If you will be providing other beverages, canned is the best way to go! Aluminum is infinitely recyclable.



If you will be ordering food delivery or using any outside vendors, make sure to communicate directly with them about the city's Zero Waste goals and the Zero Waste nature of the event to ensure that they use only disposable or compostable foodware. San Rafael businesses are already required to comply with the reusable foodware ordinance, so they should already have compostable to-go foodware.

## Waste Stations and Signage

For any event, you will need waste collection receptacles. For small events, the bins you already have in your office may be enough. For larger events, with more than 15 people, we recommend using a full-size trash can and ClearStream recycling and compost containers. This grouping of three bins together constitutes one "waste station". Larger events may need even more stations. We recommend one waste station per 50 people at an event that will be serving food and drinks.

You will also need clear signage for each waste bin. The ClearStream bins should have their own signage. If you need help with signage, contact sustainability.

Your department may already have the ClearStream system. Check with your administrator! If not, contact [Sustainability](#) to borrow ClearStream bins for your event.

## Coordinating with Janitorial or MSS

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You will also need clear signage for each waste bin. Find examples here



# Day of the Event

## Set Up

Set up your three stream waste collection system before the start of the event. For small events like a department lunch meeting, these bins may already be in place. For larger events, use a regular trash can and ClearStream recycling and compost bins for each station. You should have already identified how many bins you will need and appropriate locations for them.

### If using reusables:

Have an easily accessible foodware station with clean silverware and dirty silverware collection buckets. It's best if the reusable return station is also placed with the other three collection bins (trash, recycling, compost).

**REMEMBER:**  
Always put trash,  
recycling, and compost  
bins next to each other  
to avoid confusion



## Collection and Monitoring

Consider appointing a waste collection champion for your event, with responsibilities like ensuring all waste stations have proper signage, keeping an eye on contamination, and monitoring the bins throughout the event.

### Attendee Engagement

Identify some simple ways to inform attendees about the Zero Waste nature of the event. Specifically call out the bin locations and remind participants of our collective city-wide Zero Waste goals.

# After the Event

Congratulations! You have successfully run a Zero Waste Event! The last step is to clean up and make sure everything makes it to the right place.

## Clean Up

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Make sure all waste is properly sorted and dump bags in outside carts if applicable. Remove any contamination if necessary. If janitorial staff will be responsible for removing the waste bins, coordinate to ensure proper collection. Note that ClearStream bags are not recyclable or compostable. These bags must be emptied out into the appropriate collection carts and the bags themselves disposed of in the trash.

Break down waste station bins and store them properly. Clean and store any other event materials for reuse.

Break down and flatten cardboard boxes for recycling.

Clean and return any rented or borrowed reusable items. At City Hall, reusable silverware can be washed in the upstairs dishwasher and returned to Sustainability on the first floor.