

## Special Events Recycling Checklist

Timeline	Task Description	Notes	Started	Completed
12 months prior	Create recycling policy for your event as soon as the event is booked. Involve your local government in your project, and form your recycling committee.	Worthwhile, especially if you want to control the waste stream by acquiring biodegradable utensils and foodwares.		
12 months prior	Acquire equipment needed such as recycling containers, Dumpsters, compartmentalized trailers and signs. Depending on the size of the venue, you may want to provide communication tools & golf carts for some staff.			
At least 4 months prior	Solicit support from the community and businesses (monetary or in-kind.)			
4 months prior	Arrange for printing of T-shirts, bags or other memorabilia.			
3 months prior	Put together your volunteer recycling crew. One volunteer per station for two hours is a good starting point.	Contact local resources such as Keep America Beautiful affiliates, city and county solid waste officials and local service clubs.		
2 months prior	Hire a garbage hauler to remove garbage and recyclables from your event site. For events including livestock, arrange to have manure and bedding taken directly to a local farm for reuse.	Ask them to meet you at the site to go over the logistics of dumpster placement, recycling preparation requirements and scheduling collections.		
2 months prior	Secure a processor for compost and determine their feedstock requirements. Also secure a contractor for removal of used cooking grease, if applicable.	Composting operations taking food waste must have a permit from Georgia Environmental Protection Division to operate. Check with a state prison in your area to see if they have a large-scale food waste composting operation.		
1 month prior	Notify local media of your recycling plans.	Giving advance notice will allow them to incorporate your recycling plans into their regular event coverage.		
1 month prior	Hold first training session for volunteers.	This is a good opportunity to confirm volunteers for the event.		
14 days prior	Determine the locations of the collection kiosks and recycling sorting areas, if required.			
1 week prior	Develop staffing schedule.	Establishing a check-in helps volunteers get oriented to the event and stay on track with their work.		
1 day prior	Set up containers as needed and distribute signage throughout the event site. If appropriate, arrange for on-site announcer to remind participants of recycling availability.	Each container takes several minutes to place and arrange appropriate signs. Plan accordingly.		
Day of event	2 <sup>nd</sup> volunteer training.			
Day of event	Ice and beverage set up, distribute materials to volunteers.	Your volunteers need water, gloves, baby wipes, snacks, sunscreen; anything to help them stay comfortable and in a good mood will help.		
Day of event	Monitor containers as needed.	Don't continuously empty the recycling bins. Half-full containers are the best advertising you can have.		
Day of event	Keep containers as clean as possible.	Bees are attracted to recycling containers, and in turn can drive off participants.		

This checklist is intended as a general guide to planning recycling and waste reduction for a special event. It may be helpful to customize this guide for your own event's individual planning requirements.

# Special Events Recycling Guide

A How-To resource for waste diversion and minimization at Georgia festivals, conferences and other gatherings

## Introduction

Special events range in size from small gatherings to multi-day events that attract hundreds or thousands of people who may travel long distances just to attend. Whatever the event, they produce garbage. Because events are typically held in a somewhat controllable environment, there is an opportunity to recover materials that otherwise would be sent to the landfill. Recycling saves landfill space, reduces greenhouse gas emissions from landfills and creates economically sustainable jobs in the recycling industry.

The commitment to recycling and waste reduction on the part of organizers must be strong for a good program to be established. Advocates for recycling must keep in mind that festivals and events are complex operations, and that those who manage them, whether paid or volunteer, have a huge variety of tasks to accomplish. It is therefore necessary to determine the level of initial support among organizers for recycling and waste reduction. If it is strong, by all means proceed with enthusiasm. If not, then an initial year might best be spent on education and gentle persuasion rather than attempting to develop a program with lukewarm support. It may be productive to solicit the help of key festival patrons who share an interest in recycling.

The amount of work required to establish and operate an effective recycling program should not be underestimated. The substantial positive rewards that a good effort will bring are only possible through hard work on the part of a lot of people. Staying on top of things at each point in the process is the key to success. If recycling at your event is a new program, it's a good idea to create a committee of dedicated, knowledgeable people to design, implement, and run the recycling program for the duration of the event. This committee may also be responsible for recruiting and training the volunteers you'll need to successfully manage a special event recycling program.

## Sharing the costs

There will be costs associated with a recycling project, and they will likely be highest during the initial year of operation. These expenses may exceed the tipping fees that are saved by diverting materials from the landfill and any revenues received from recyclables. Even if the event as a whole generates a positive cash flow after accounting for program expenses, there may be other reasons to seek corporate support, either financial or in kind, specifically for recycling. The involvement of local businesses is a way to reinforce the importance of recycling both at the event and in the general community. It may also assist in expanding the pool of volunteers, and, in fact, this could be one of the best kinds of support.

Solicitation of sponsors is standard practice for many festivals, fairs, and other special events. Adding a recycling program to the list of potential sponsored activities may expand the field of potential supporters for your event. Sponsorship can be segmented into several different levels such as a general sponsor and several recycling station sponsors.

## Staffing

It is highly unlikely that accurate sorting of materials by patrons will occur without some personalized help. This

means that in a perfect world, each recycling station should be attended during the entire course of the event. While it is possible for one person to rotate between two nearby stations, this approach means that a substantial amount of secondary sorting (by the volunteer or recyclable material processor) will have to be done.

The need to staff the recycling effort means that more volunteers will be necessary than would be the case simply to collect the garbage. The number of volunteers required can be calculated by multiplying the number of stations



Plentiful, eager volunteers are needed to place and staff recycling containers.

times the number of shifts during the entire event (two hour shifts are probably long enough), and adding in the number of set-up and take-down staff, garbage and recyclables handlers, and fill-in volunteers that will be needed. **Recruiting this group of people may be the single most important factor in the success of the program.** Clearly it is best to have people who are strongly committed to the idea and practice of recycling. They must also be reliable and should be good with patrons - to the point of making recycling a positive and enjoyable experience which adds to the overall impression of the event. While recruiting select individuals may lead to the very best results, it is often more practical to approach groups for help. There are more than 65 local Keep America Beautiful affiliates in Georgia; these volunteer-based community improvement organizations provide an excellent starting point for running a clean event. Other organizations such as outdoor groups (Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited), recreational clubs, seniors organizations, community improvement associations, and arts groups are good candidates. Any organization that participates in Adopt-A-Highway, Adopt-A-Stream or similar activities is also a possibility. Service clubs, church and youth groups are all natural choices.

Because having adequate numbers of high quality volunteers is so important, the recruitment process needs to start early and be maintained right through the event. Groups can achieve a positive presence within the community by staffing the stations, and this can be emphasized during recruiting. It also may help to offer free admission, free or reduced prices on food, or gift certificates from sponsors.

## Staff Training and Sorting Guidelines

If collected materials will be sorted before hauling, volunteers must be familiar with the process. Without adequate training, the sort will not be accurate and the volunteers are likely to be frustrated rather than satisfied with their contributions. At least two sessions are necessary. The first should be about a month in advance of the event when there is plenty of time to

explain the entire operation, establish a schedule for each volunteer, and introduce the basic elements of each recycling station. A significant portion of this meeting should address the question of why the recycling program is being offered and it should emphasize the need for a high quality sort. At this time it is a good idea to give an overview of the kinds of materials that can be expected at the stations and to explain the condition of local materials markets.

The second training session should be held on-site before the event begins. While not every volunteer is likely to be able to attend, each should be strongly encouraged to do so if at all possible.

## KNOW THE WASTE STREAM

Once you've identified your committee, solicited local businesses for help, and lined up your volunteers you're ready to design your recycling program. This means getting to know what exactly is in the waste stream. Traditionally, food and plastics (bottles, plates, utensils, and food wrap) are the largest components at festivals, fairs, and events, but you'll have to determine if this holds true for your event. Other items may include aluminum cans, glass, tin, cardboard, and wood.

## Choosing What to Recycle



*Deciding which materials to target for recycling depends on the waste stream your event will generate. If it's a workshop or educational setting where participants will be using a lot of paper, it makes sense to target office paper. If you're planning a chili cook-off, you can probably skip the office paper recycling.*

Deciding what materials to divert from the waste stream for recycling is directly connected to identifying what waste will be generated. For outside festivals involving a lot of cooking, eating, and drinking you may want to target food waste and common beverage containers, such as aluminum cans (soda, beer) and #1 plastic, or PETE (water, soda, sports drinks). For an indoor business-style conference, you may want to focus primarily on office paper. Before finalizing any decision to add a material for waste diversion, however, it is essential to line up a processor for that material.

## Recycling Stations

The success of any recycling program depends in part on convenience. To achieve high participation rates for voluntary recycling, the process must be easy and quick. Create recycling and waste disposal stations with recycling receptacles that are clearly different than garbage receptacles. The recycling stations must be visible and clearly labeled to show which materials are to be placed in each container.



*Recycling containers should be highly visible, and clearly marked with what materials they accept.*

While signage is important, it is insufficient by itself because many people simply peer into the containers to see if they can match their waste with the contents of each bin.

Assuming that the recycling stations are adequately staffed during the event, the number of containers required may be about the same as the amount needed for collecting garbage in the past. It is critical that all containers on the site of the event be part of the recycling stations, so any permanent receptacles that are not part of a station should be securely closed. Purchasing recycling containers for an annual event is generally not financially justifiable. Standard 55 gallon drums may be perfectly adequate, and other kinds of receptacles can work as well. Many food vendors, recycling hauling and processing facilities and municipal recycling centers have containers they may be willing to donate for use at the event. Each station should also be equipped with a chair for volunteers.

Although aluminum cans may be only a small fraction of the waste at a typical festival, they are a highly desirable recyclable material. Special receptacles with small openings can be used for these items, and the proceeds from recycling the aluminum cans may help offset the costs of the recycling program.

## Location

Experienced hands will intuitively know where to locate the recycling stations. The most important factor is to put them in close proximity to where people eat. This may or may not be adjacent to the food vendors. Another likely location is near the primary exits, especially when concerts or other forms of entertainment signal the conclusion of a day's activities.

Recycling stations must be easily accessible, should not intrude into vendor serving areas, and need to be immediately identifiable. It is important to also plan their location in relation to the recycling staging area or other means of storage during the event. Bags of recyclables can be heavy or bulky and may leak, so stations should be as near to the staging or storage as possible.

## Bags

The matter of bags to be used in the collection barrel or container is important. Make sure the bags are large enough to fit over the top of your collection bins and strong enough to transport the recyclables from the collection station to the recyclables staging or storage area. Bags should be secured to the barrel at the top with duct tape or perhaps, for a



*Budgets don't always allow for material-specific recycling containers like this one for PETE plastic, but you may get support from a local government recycling official who will let you borrow some of their containers.*



*Locate your collection containers where participants have easy access, but also where your volunteers can empty them before they wind up looking like this one.*

*Don't skimp on bags. Your volunteers will appreciate your choice of a high-quality, strong bag that can be securely fastened to the container, and won't tear when loaded with recyclables.*



better appearance, a colored tape that matches the receptacle. Extra bags can be placed in the bottom of the container to make replacement easy.

## Signage

The purpose of signage at the recycling stations is twofold. First, it alerts patrons about the presence of the program and announces the location of the station. Signs should be big and

## WHAT TO DO WITH COLLECTED MATERIAL

Before collecting a single item for recycling, you must decide where you're going to take the material, and how it's going to get there.

## Contracting with a Hauler

Selecting a reliable hauler is essential for more than just the recycling aspect of your event. You do not want bags of collected materials sitting around the site for days afterwards. Make sure to get a properly licensed, bonded hauler who will use relatively clean vehicles to collect the recyclables as unobtrusively as possible. You do not want a big truck making the rounds at your outdoor fair during lunch! Work with the vendor to set up collection points and times. It is essential to communicate with your hauler before the event, to give you an opportunity to discuss special concerns you have that they may not be familiar with. Your final contract should include a description of your waste reduction objectives for the event.

## Identifying Collectors/Processors

Options for choosing a processor or collector of recyclable material will likely be determined by the location of your event, as it is not cost-effective to haul collected materials long distances. The Department of Community Affairs can assist in this decision. Use the online Recycling Markets Directory ([www.dca.state.ga.us/environmental/recycling/default.asp](http://www.dca.state.ga.us/environmental/recycling/default.asp)) or call 404-679-4940. The Georgia Recycling Coalition ([www.georgiarecycles.org](http://www.georgiarecycles.org)) and Earth's 911 ([www.earth911.org](http://www.earth911.org)) are other resources for identifying a place to take your recyclables. In any case, a phone call to a local government recycling coordinator can often provide a sound second opinion regarding the potential processor.



*Work with your hauler to determine the best location for collected recyclables to be stored. Depending on how many different materials you're collecting, a compartmentalized trailer may be a good choice.*

## Litter Free Event

With enough advance planning, some events can be made virtually litter-free. The main differences between simply diverting recyclable materials from the waste stream and hosting a litter-free event are more aggressive recycling, particularly regarding food waste, and using biodegradable materials at the event.

bold. They also need to be attractive and should recognize sponsors when appropriate. Secondly, signs must inform people about which items should be placed in each receptacle. In this regard, they need to be simple.

Other kinds of signs may be necessary or helpful as well. It is a good idea to let patrons know what is going on at the event and to encourage their help in the sorting process. Since any permanent trash receptacles not a part of the recycling effort should be closed off securely, signs pointing to the nearest recycling station are important. Sponsor recognition may require additional signs, or perhaps inclusion on the recycling station banners. Be creative - you may be able to have a local sign company sponsor your event. Signs that are mounted onto foam core board and laminated can be professional looking, surprisingly durable, and inexpensive.

If you're planning on printing up T-shirts or some other commemorative item for your event, consider using cloth carrying bags instead. They can be printed with a message or sponsor's logo, and used by participants for carrying items at the event. At events that will include a public address system, coordinate with the person who will be speaking and ask them to remind participants that recycling is available on site.