



Green Event Guidelines

Study: Los Altos Community Picnic 2008/2009

In 2008, Los Altos Community Picnic organizers focused on one aspect of sustainability for the event: waste diversion. To accomplish this goal, GreenTown Los Altos set up three-bin stations to separate compost and recycling from the trash. GreenTown volunteers successfully diverted 75% of the waste generated at the 2008 event to composting and recycling facilities and away from the landfill.

In 2009, Los Altos Community Picnic organizers set a goal to green all areas of the event, working with GreenTown Los Altos and using the Greening Your Event tips outlined below. In addition to establishing new green goals, with help of GreenTown Los Altos volunteers, 76 percent of event waste was diverted from the landfill

Working together, we can benefit the environment, save money, and improve the overall efficiency and sustainability of every event. Follow the guidelines below to plan your own successful green event.

Greening Your Event

Planning ahead is the most effective tool to making events environmentally friendly. Encourage, educate, and involve your committee members as you plan how to green your event. Decide on the green goals for your event, so that you can enlist vendors to help you achieve your goals and so that volunteers understand the objectives. Publicize your green goals before and during the event to raise awareness of the environment. Add to the lists below. Be creative!

Reduce

- Send memos and information electronically to save paper.
- Use large, easy-to-read display boards and signs instead of distributing multiple copies of maps.
- Buy picnic items with the least amount of packaging to reduce trash.
- Use the smallest size napkins to reduce paper use.

Reuse

- Choose containers that can be reused instead of thrown away.
- Use plastic tablecloths that wipe clean and are re-usable.
- Use cloth rags, sponges, and soap and water for cleaning instead of paper towels and heavy-duty chemical cleaners.

Recycle

- Buy picnic products made of recycled materials.
- Use compostable or biodegradable food service ware.
- Use recycling stations to separate your compostable and recyclable food and beverage containers from your trash.

Transportation

Most people come by car. Encourage other options, below, for getting to the event. Collect data, if possible, on how many attendees use each of these options. For example, ask your volunteers to track the number of bicycles that park in a bicycle parking area.

- Walk.
- Carpool (3 or more riders per car): Restrict one or two rows of the parking lot for carpool parking only.

- Bike: Provide a secure bike and helmet storage area staffed with volunteers. Check and publicize the best bike routes from different directions to the event.
- Bus: Check and publicize bus routes to the event.

Add Convenience for Attendees and Vendors

- Create a carpool drop-off spot, using volunteers to help with seniors/wheelchairs/walkers or equipment for younger children (strollers, playpens.)
- Provide golf carts to help vendors get their booth materials to assigned spaces in order to reduce traffic congestion near the venue.
- Consider offering raffle prizes for people using a green transportation option.

Water

- Encourage people to bring their own refillable water bottles to the event.
- Encourage people to drink tap water by including drinking fountains on the site map.
- Display a poster over each drinking fountain to educate attendees about the advantages, including dollars saved, of drinking tap water. Include statistics on the problems created by bottled water (60 million plastic water bottles per day consumed in U.S. according to container-recycling.org.)
- Find a sponsor or company to provide a water dispenser so people can help themselves or refill their reusable bottles. If free water is available, encourage drink vendors not to sell bottled water.
- Offer paper cups, perhaps in a variety of sizes. Encourage people to pour only as much water as they need (to save water) and put used cups in the compostables bin.

Waste

Plan Ahead

- Choose a garbage company and vendors who are willing to work with you to achieve your green goals.
- Order 3-bin recycling stations by ClearStream (color coded frames and lids for trash, recycling, and compost) from your waste contractor as soon as the event date is confirmed.
- Determine all types of waste likely to be generated at the event to ensure its proper disposal. For example, the ice cream vendor empties many 5-gallon cardboard/metal tubs (the cardboard can be composted, and the metal may be removed and recycled.)
- Do a walk-through of the event venue to plot on the event map the location of garbage cans, portable restrooms, and a staging area for full garbage bags and flattened cardboard boxes.
- Order portable restrooms and hand-washing stations if needed. Provide a compostable bin for used paper towels.
- Provide a bucket at each recycling station so beverage containers can be emptied before they are put in the recycling bin. Encourage bin volunteers to pour used liquids on a plant rather than down the drain.
- Find out what waste was collected the prior year and aim for a reduction.

Educate During the Event

- Schedule a coordinator for each shift to train bin monitors how to help event participants deposit recyclables, compostables, and trash in the correct bins and where to stage full garbage bags and flattened cardboard.
- Prepare signs for each bin and tape actual samples from the event of the items that will go in each bin.
- Take photos showing bin setup on event day for next year's chairperson.
- Ask bin monitors to query event participants if this system made recycling easy for them.

After the Event

- Assign volunteers to inspect trash; some separating and sorting may be needed to pull recyclables and compostables out of the trash bags.
- Count, weigh, and tally the bags of each type collected from the three-bin stations. After pickup, call the waste contractor for tonnage.
- Take photos for a visual record of how many bags of each type were collected.
- Publish waste-reduction results in the local newspaper.

Publicity & Printing

Plan Ahead

- Brainstorm ways to reduce the amount of paper and printed materials generated for the event, for example, use email, reduce the quantity and/or size of flyers (use a half-page), print double-sided.
- Buy and use recycled paper with the highest percentage of post-consumer waste.
- Provide clearly labeled containers at exits to collect printed materials that can be reused next year or recycled.
- Provide suggestions to the public for how to pack their own zero-waste food.
- Decide in advance how you will measure the green actions at this event. Include comparisons with prior years and quantify, if possible.

Partner with a “Green” Printer

- Use paper with the highest percentage of post-consumer waste possible.
- Use soy or veggie-based inks.
- Include “recycle this page,” “printed with soy ink,” or similar messages as appropriate.

Educate

- Use large poster displays of event schedule and map rather than printing individual copies for each attendee.
- Find out what each committee is doing to green the event and write those ideas into public service reminders to be announced over the public address system during the event. For example, prepare waste-related announcements to encourage waste reduction and recycling.
- Include green event actions in all pre-event publicity.

After the Event

- Write notes and tips for the next chairperson, including what worked and what didn't.

Food & Beverage Vendors

- Review any city/county health regulations that impact vendors and inform them that they must comply to these regulations prior to serving food on event day.
- Before inviting any vendors, write up the regulations/permits relating to food/beverages for the event (for example, homemade items not allowed, no alcohol allowed.)
- Create or revise an application form that includes “green” questions, suggestions, and requirements regarding vendor food purchases, preparation, and waste created.
- Use vendors/caterers who will promote green awareness by:
 - Using washable/reusable serving equipment (chafing dishes, pitchers, condiment dispensers, etc.).

- Providing plates, bowls, cups, silverware, and napkins that are reusable or washable (best); biodegradable or compostable (very good); or recyclable (good). No Styrofoam, mylar, individual condiment packets, or plastic straws.
- Learning what options are available for bulk buying of greenware.
- Letting you know prior to the event what waste their booth will generate and will provide samples of their containers for display at the trash/recycling stations.

Power Generation/Children's Area

If inflatable toy structures are used, choose a vendor willing to:

- Locate the structures where the noise has the least impact and the structures do not damage the grass.
- Set up the structure early so the pumping-up phase (noisy) occurs before the event starts.
- Use a less polluting way of generating power—biodiesel, solar—if possible.