

UCSC Zero Waste Events Guide

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Zero Waste Cheatsheet

**Request zero waste stations 2 weeks before event,
via [CruzFix](#) or call 831-459-4444
(75 guests for each zero waste station, less if food is involved)**

**Request custodial services 2 weeks before event,
via [CruzFix](#) or call 831-459-4444**

**Recycling, compost, and landfill bins are placed directly next
to each other and conveniently located**

Every bin has a [zero waste sign](#) on or near it

Trash talkers are present to help attendees sort waste

**When reusables aren't available, compostable single-use
eating ware is used**

**Donate leftover food to attendees, event volunteers, or to an
on-campus food recovery group**

**Avoid single-use decorations, balloons, and dates on promo
items, decorate with music, lighting and screens**

**Swag creates a lot of waste, the [Swag](#) section of the Zero
Waste Guide offers alternatives**

Check out the full [Zero Waste Guide](#) for more details

The Basics

What is a zero waste event?

Zero waste doesn't mean there is no waste generated, rather it means that event planners have done their best to create an event that generates minimal waste and diverts generated waste to recycling and compost to the extent possible. The UC defines zero waste as a 90% diversion rate from landfills, while we may not always hit that target, we can always strive for zero waste events!

By following the advice in this guide, event planners can play a key role in meeting UCSC's zero waste and reduction goals! The UC system has challenged each campus to achieve zero waste in all its operations. The UC also set a goal of 25% total waste reduction by 2025 and a 50% reduction by 2030. Check out the [Zero Waste Initiatives](#) webpage for current progress to UCSC's waste goals.

Setting up a zero waste event may seem daunting, don't worry, we're here to help!

- General questions about UCSC's waste management system can be directed to recycling@ucsc.edu.
- The Work Order Desk can help you reserve zero waste stations and request custodial services, call them at 831-459-4444 or use [CruzFix](#).
- The Sustainability Office is happy to meet with event planners to discuss their events.
- The Sustainability Office may be able to provide student "Trash Talkers" to events (depending on availability) or can train event staff to trash talk.
 - Trash talkers assist attendees as they approach a zero waste station to properly sort their waste items. Having Trash Talkers at each zero waste station at your event is the single best way to reduce contamination and improve diversion rates. For example, Cornucopia 2022 had an 80% diversion rate because Trash Talkers were located at every zero waste station during the event.
- Additional zero waste resources are available at the Sustainability Office's [Zero Waste Initiatives](#) webpage.

Zero waste is a journey, after your event you should reflect on zero waste improvements for your next event. The goal is to continually reduce waste and improve diversion rates at each subsequent event. If you'd like to know the diversion rate of your event, let Grounds know at the time of submitting your work order so they can share that information after your event ends.

Bins

One of the most important parts of a zero waste event is to make sure attendees have plenty of opportunities to throw away any waste items they have.

- Every event must have conveniently located recycling, compost, and landfill bins throughout the event space.
 - This set of three bins is called a zero waste station.
- A landfill, recycling, and compost bin should always be placed directly next to each other. This ensures that attendees do not need to travel any farther to dispose of a certain kind of waste. This will reduce the amount of contamination in each bin.
- Event planners should visit their venue as early as possible to determine if zero waste stations are already located on site that will meet their event needs.
- If there are no zero waste stations present or the quantity will not handle the level of anticipated waste, more zero waste stations should be ordered by placing a request in [CruzFix](#) or by calling the Work Order Desk and 831-459-4444, no later than 2 weeks before the event date.
 - Grounds staff will drop off the zero waste stations before the event and will pick up afterwards. Event planners should plan to manage the waste in each zero waste station during the event, unless otherwise discussed with Grounds.
- If the event is to be held within a building, a request should be placed to Custodial services ([CruzFix](#) or by calling the Work Order Desk and 831-459-4444) to request zero waste stations or cleaning services, before, during, and/or after the event. This should be requested no later than 2 weeks before the event date.
- Costs for Grounds and Custodial services can be found [here](#), subject to change.
- As a general rule of thumb, one zero waste station covers 75 - 100 anticipated attendees. This may vary depending on the specifics of your event. For example, events with a meal may require more zero waste stations.
- Event planners should consider the flow of traffic to determine the best spots for zero waste stations. Entrances and exits are great places to capture waste as well as near dining areas. Event planners should move zero waste stations during the event if they notice waste congregating in certain areas (be sure to check if pre-existing bins can be moved).
- Make sure compost bins have a compostable liner (usually light green). The liner should state that it's compostable (biodegradable isn't the same thing - learn more [here](#)).
- It's key that campus users have the same waste disposal experience no matter where they are on campus, so make-shift bins or ones that do not match the zero waste stations pictured below should be avoided.



Exterior bins

Interior bins

Signage

Once you have the bins in place, attendees need to know what goes into each bin. Attendees' knowledge of UCSC's waste system may vary drastically so event planners should expect that attendees may have questions about what to put in each bin.

- At each zero waste station the UCSC standard waste signage (pictured below) should be located in a prominent location. Each bin should already have a sign on them but larger signs may be needed.
- Copies of the standard [recycling](#), [compost](#), and [landfill](#) signage can be downloaded from the Sustainability Office's [Zero Waste Initiatives](#) webpage.
- If you have particular items, additional signage can help alleviate confusion. A common example is that many attendees may not be aware that their eating ware is compostable. Event planners can place specific signs at the spot where attendees pick up the item indicating that this item is compostable (such as in the serving line, if a meal is being served on compostable eating ware).
- Signs can only accomplish so much, event planners should make an announcement at the beginning or during the event to help attendees. This can highlight where zero waste stations are, specifically state recycling, compost, and landfill bins are present, and instruct attendees which bin confusing items should be placed. Here's a simple script you can use:
 - "Welcome to [insert event name]. Before we begin, we're happy to share that we're striving to make this a zero waste event. We have located zero waste stations at [insert locations]. At these zero waste stations we have recycling, compost, and landfill bins, we ask that you consult the signs on the bins or ask one of our trash talkers (if you have them) if you have questions. All of your eating ware, plates, cups, bowls, silverware, etc. is compostable so can be disposed of in the green compost bins. Thank you for helping us make this a zero waste event!"



Standard UCSC waste signage

Food & Beverages

Many events have some sort of food or beverage component to it. While important, food and beverages can create a lot of waste, including packaging, eating ware, and food waste. Here's some considerations to reduce the amount of waste that food and beverages create:

- When food is present at an event, the most zero waste option would be to use reusable eating ware.
- When that is not possible, reducing the amount of single-use items to only the essentials is important. For example, if you know that your food only requires a fork, don't purchase a complete utensil pack.
- Fiber-based compostable single-use products should be used. World Centric's [Leaf+](#) compostable eating ware line is the preferred compostable eating ware for campus.
- Food that requires less packaging and eating ware should be prioritized, such as handheld food items or items bought in bulk.
- Event planners should communicate with attendees beforehand to let them know if they can/should bring their own eating ware. For example, letting attendees know there will be a way to fill up water bottles so attendees should bring their own reusable water bottle.
- Single-use water bottles should not be bought for events, rather a water bottle refilling station (for large events), a water cooler, or directions to the nearest water fountain/hydration station should be provided.
 - UCSC has rented large water bottle filling stations from [US Pure Water](#), they can be contacted [here](#).
- Donate leftovers at the end of your event so they don't become food waste. Be sure to discuss donation plans with catering before the event if you're using catering services. Donating leftovers could include:
 - Letting attendees take food home with them. You may need to plan ahead and offer some kind of container to take food. You could reduce waste by using containers from the event instead of throwing them out.
 - Letting employees or volunteers know they can take extra food home with them. You could let this group know beforehand to bring reusable to-go containers with them in the event of excess food.
 - Before your event, reach out to one of the food recovery organizations on campus to coordinate a pick up of leftover food, such as the Cowell Coffee Shop or Redwood Free Market.
- Food & liquids is the largest contaminate for event waste, Trash Talkers at each zero waste station is a great way to combat this contamination.

Swag

We all know that people like free stuff but the dirty truth is most of that stuff ends up in a landfill very soon after the event ends. Eliminating swag is the best way to reduce waste (in addition to saving money) but if there is a desire to use free stuff to attract participation, here are some ways that you can do that in a low waste way:

- Use one (or a few) large item(s) to draw attention. Giving away one large raffle prize rather than individual items can engage attendees without the individual waste.
- Give away food, something handheld like a cookie.
- Give away an item that can be useful, like a notebook. Make sure the item is actually useful, reusable grocery bags is an example of an item that many people already have too many of.
- Give away something that promotes a low waste lifestyle, like a reusable ziploc baggie or mason jar.
- Use QR codes instead of handing out pamphlets or flyers.

Decorations

Let's make our events fun and inviting without decorating the landfill! Here are some ideas to keep decoration waste to a minimum:

- Decorations that can be used multiple times should be prioritized.
- Posters, banners, shirts, and signs should not have dates included on them so they can be used for the same event year after year.
- Balloons should not be used, the remnants of balloons remain in the environment for years to come and wildlife consume them at alarming rates. Biodegradable balloons are not the solution, those also stay around longer than consumers realize thus causing the same issues with wildlife consumption. Rather, reusable balloons, papercrete balloons, or alternative decorations should be used.
- Share with other offices and check with other offices before buying new decorations.
- Create an inviting ambiance with music and lighting.
- If you're in a room with a screen put on a background image/video for example, this [fireplace](#) video.