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San Francisco Uses Ordinance to Promote Recycling in Public Places

San Francisco hosts thousands of sporting events, street fairs, festivals, and concerts annually. Although these events bring communities together, they also generate large amounts of waste. To cut down on this volume of waste, the city passed an ordinance that requires recycling at special events. In addition, San Francisco banned the use of polystyrene food service ware by vendors. As a result, San Francisco's innovative public space recycling program helped the city achieve a 70 percent waste diversion rate in 2006, surpassing the state-mandated recycling law.

Photo: San Francisco Clean City Coalition



This recycling station set up at Carnaval San Francisco features a "Recycle Here" banner posted above the recycling bin and nearby trash container.

State of California Program Overview

Waste generated at public venues and special events like fairs and festivals can build up in a short time. To curb the volume of waste, the California legislature passed Assembly Bill (AB) 2176 (Montanez, Chapter 879) in 2004, which requires large public venues and special events to develop and implement solid waste management plans and strategies to increase recycling and reduce waste. The law also promotes planning for recycling during design and operation of those venues and events.

In addition, all California cities and counties must comply with the Integrated Waste Management Act of 1989, which mandates that each jurisdiction reduce waste disposal by at least 50 percent. As part of their annual reports on waste diversion to the state, cities and counties report their waste reduction progress at the top 10 percent (by waste generation) of large venues and special events.



Polystyrene Ban

Starting in June 2007, San Francisco prohibited food vendors from using polystyrene food service ware. Recyclable alternative products include the following:

- Aluminum foil and trays
- Plastic containers and lids (#1, #2, #4, #5, and #7)

The city may assess fines of \$100–\$500 for violations of the law. As a result of the ban, coordinators often choose recyclable paper and #1 and #2 plastic products in lieu of harder-to-recycle materials. Due to the potential for high contamination rates, the San Francisco Department of the Environment is currently making composting voluntary at special events.

Program Outreach

To help cities, counties, venues, and event operators comply with AB 2176, the California Integrated Waste Management Board created a Web site that helps users develop waste reduction and recycling programs. Tools include sample ordinances and policies, cost calculators, case studies, and links to government and industry resources such as recycled-content product suppliers and material recyclers.

City and County of San Francisco Program Overview

San Francisco requires recycling at all special events. Event coordinators are required to recycle the following items:

- Glass bottles and jars
- Aluminum and tin cans
- Plastic containers (#1 and #7)
- Plastic tubs and lids (#2, #4, and #5)
- Rigid plastics, such as clamshell and plant containers
- Newspaper
- Corrugated cardboard
- Office paper
- Other paper items, including egg cartons

As the first large city in the nation to collect food scraps citywide, San Francisco offers event coordinators the opportunity to compost food scraps, including shellfish, meat, bones, banana peels, and coffee grounds; food-soiled paper such as paper napkins, paper milk cartons, and pizza boxes; and plants such as floral and tree trimmings. The food scraps are made into nitrogen-rich compost for use by vineyards in California’s wine country.

“Event producers are ready to go green at their events. In fact, I’ve heard that there’s an informal competition among event producers to see who can have the greenest event.”

*Alexa Kielty
Residential Recycling and Special Projects Assistant
San Francisco Department of the Environment*



Photo: Green Mary, Good Housekeeping for Mother Earth

These cardboard bins were on hand at the EcoCity World Summit to encourage recycling and composting. The containers are clearly labeled with what materials each collects.



Photo: San Francisco Clean City Coalition

Clearly labeling debris boxes and dumpsters is important to show event staff where to dispose of materials, helping reduce contamination.

To ensure that recycling happens at special events, San Francisco's Special Events Ordinance No. 73-89 requires event organizers to submit recycling plans with their permit applications. This applies to street fairs, athletic events, or any other event requiring temporary use or occupancy of a public street where beverage containers will be dispensed or a large amount of other recyclable materials will be generated. The event permit application contains recycling guidelines developed by San Francisco's Department of the Environment (SF Environment).

Among other things, event coordinators are required to do the following:

- Achieve or exceed a 20 percent recycling rate.
- Submit proof of trash and recycling service to the Department of Parking and Traffic (DPT) 30 days prior to the event.
- Attend a recycling training workshop and submit the certificate to DPT 30 days prior to the event (or contract with a city-registered provider of recycling services for special events).
- Provide event vendors information on recycling practices and related products and encourage them to use recyclable products.
- Mark all trash and recycling bins clearly, place blue recycling bins next to each trash bin, and frequently check them during the event to make sure trash isn't mixed in with the recyclables, also known as contamination.
- Oversee and ensure consolidation of recyclables into debris boxes.

Event coordinators must require vendors to follow the food service ware ordinance requiring them to use recyclable or compostable food service ware.



Photo: Alexa Kieilty, SF Environment

Properly labeling polylactic acid products is imperative to recognizing their compostability.



Photo: San Francisco Clean City Coalition

Staff members from the San Francisco Clean City Coalition are lining bins to prepare festival recycling stations.

Recycling Plan. To receive a permit to hold a special event, coordinators must submit a recycling plan that is approved by DPT for events on city property and by the Recreation & Park Department (RPD) for events on park lands. The plan must include arrangements for collection and disposal of separated recyclables and compostables by a service provider or the event organizer.

SF Environment monitors recycling rates at events by contacting the city's hauler for figures on the amount of waste generated and recycled at each event. Event coordinators who fail to meet the 20 percent recycling goal receive a call from an SF Environment staff person, who explains how to develop a better recycling plan so that subsequent events achieve better recycling rates. This follow-up is critical because without it, "recycling rates would be significantly lower," says Alexa Kielty, SF Environment's residential recycling and special projects assistant.

Enforcement. The ordinance does not authorize fines. Rather, DPT can refuse to issue a permit if an event coordinator fails to submit a recycling plan or if the plan is inadequate. RPD helps ensure compliance by requiring a \$100 deposit from event planners that the department keeps if the event fails to comply with the recycling requirements.

Recycling Containers. Event coordinators can purchase cardboard containers for recycling or 64-gallon rolling carts from the city's hauler.

Costs and Benefits. Recyclable and compostable materials are collected at a discounted rate compared to garbage. "The more recycling and composting, the lower the garbage bill," Kielty says.

Education and Outreach

SF Environment aims to get 100 of its highest profile and largest events to recycle at least 20 percent of the waste they generate. The department reaches event coordinators through two ways:

- Including the city's recycling requirements for special events in the permit package.
- Offering 2-hour recycling workshops on a quarterly basis that event coordinators must attend unless they plan to use one of the city's registered recycling providers.

The workshops provide event coordinators an opportunity to learn about the city's recycling requirements, hear tips from experienced event recyclers, and ask recycling service providers questions about recycling collection. To help ensure that coordinators have a successful recycling program, the city gives workshop participants a checklist of things they need to do before, during, and after an event.

Challenges and Solutions

Challenge: One challenge is securing buy-in from partner agencies to include the requirements of the special events ordinance in event permit packages.

Solution: SF Environment staff made it as easy as possible for partner agencies to adopt the requirements by drafting the permit language. RPD now includes

Photo: San Francisco Clean City Coalition



Recycling stations should be monitored and emptied regularly. Here, a worker with the San Francisco Clean City Coalition monitors a recycling station to reduce contamination.

recycling requirements in its event permit application.

Challenge: Keeping track of waste generation and recycling rates can be difficult because there are hundreds of events in the city each year with up to 500,000 people.

Solution: At the start of the event season, SF Environment sends the waste hauler a list of events for which it would like the hauler to track recycling diversion numbers. Providing the upfront notice and clarifying the city's need for collecting these data motivated the hauler to develop a better internal tracking system. As a result, reporting waste generation and recycling rates has improved dramatically.

Photo: Gia Grant, San Francisco Clean City Coalition



During San Francisco's Fillmore Jazz Festival, vendors deposited food scraps and paper food service ware in collection boxes for composting.

Challenge: Collecting organic material at events is tricky. Food scraps collection containers need to be monitored closely to prevent contamination. Also, event coordinators need to secure vendor compliance in purchasing only compostable products and properly using the recycling and composting containers.

Solution: Currently, event coordinators and vendors compost on a voluntary basis. Although the challenge of collecting compost is not completely solved, this gradual approach gives SF Environment time to develop strategies to minimize contamination of compost loads at special events.

Tools at a Glance

California's [Venues and Events Web site](#), created for venue facility operators, event managers, vendors, promoters, and concessionaires, provides tools such as sample ordinances and policies, cost calculators, case studies, and links to government and industry resources such as recycled-content product suppliers.

SF Environment's [Recycling Checklist for Special Events](#) outlines special event recycling requirements and gives planners a list of things they need to do before, during, and after events to ensure that waste reduction and recycling efforts are successful.

The Bottom Line

- San Francisco has an ordinance requiring recycling at special events. However, the key to making it work is incorporating the recycling requirements into the permitting process. Because it can take a long time to pass an ordinance, Alexa Kielty advises other cities and counties to approach the city's permitting agencies first and work with them to integrate recycling requirements into their event permits.
- If recycling is required at special events, it's important to educate event planners. SF Environment finds that workshops are an effective way to do this.

Regulations at a Glance

California's Public Resources Code 42648, [AB 2176](#), describes the ordinance for recycling at special events.

Integrated Waste Management Act: [AB 939](#).

[San Francisco Special Events Ordinance No. 73-89](#) requires planners to submit recycling plans with their permit applications. This applies to street fairs, athletic events, or any other event requiring temporary use or occupancy of a public street where beverage containers will be dispensed or a large amount of other recyclables will be generated.

[Food Service Ware Ordinance](#) bans use of polystyrene food service ware.

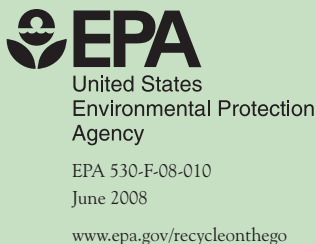
[Food Service Waste Reduction Ordinance](#) provides a link to approved food service ware products and suppliers.

[Special Event Permit Guidelines](#) are provided to event planners when they apply for permits from DPT and RPD. They require proof that event planners have scheduled adequate garbage and recycling services and taken SF Environment's recycling training workshop or contracted with a registered recycling provider for their events.

More Information

For more information, visit EPA's *Recycle on the Go* Web site at www.epa.gov/recycleonthego or contact:

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Recycle
on the **GO**

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www.epa.gov/recycleonthego