

# Guidance on Green Events

## Environmentally-Responsible Conferences, Meetings and Events



Conferences, meetings and events can result in significant environmental impacts from the amount of waste generated, the amount of materials used, the transportation to and from, and the energy and water consumed during the event. For an environmentally-responsible organization, a wasteful conference or event can be an embarrassment, as well as have a negative impact on an otherwise positive experience for the participants. Thoughtfully-planned green events will clearly communicate to participants that the organizers are committed to minimizing the event's environmental impacts.

Planning a green event does not mean additional incurred costs – it simply requires a change in mindset and some thoughtful, up-front planning. Facilities that are prepared to host green conferences, meetings and events will make the event organizer's job that much easier; and hopefully, that facility will be rewarded with repeat business and referrals. Participants in the Maryland Green Travel program would be the natural choice for hosting green conferences, meetings and events.

## Checklist for Planning Green Events

### BEFORE THE EVENT:

- Start with a *Maryland Green Travel* Facility.** Have the event at a facility that is environmentally-conscious. Maryland Green Travel facilities are required to support green conferences, meetings and events as part of their commitments to join the program. MGT facilities should be ready to actively support a green event.
- Put it in Writing.** Establish an environmental plan or policy for the event and work with all parties involved in the event to adhere to the plan. Share the plan.
- Electronic Registration, Correspondence & Promotion.** Event information should be provided electronically via e-mail or an internet site to reduce paper use, printing and mailing.
- Printing.**
  - All printed materials should be on recycled-content paper that contains at least 50% post consumer material and is not chlorine bleached. Strive to use paper that is certified as FSC (Forest Stewardship Council), indicates a high post-consumer content or is tree free paper made from agricultural residue. Use the FSC logo whenever possible.
  - Double-sided printing and copying. This is a must for all conference-related printing and copying.
  - Contract with printers who utilize pollution prevention techniques. (e.g., Soy-Based and other less hazardous inks, energy-efficient equipment, recycled content and recyclable paper and banners, and other waste reducing practices)

- Accurate Attendance.** Accurate attendance counts given to service providers will reduce food and other event wastes.
- Proximity of Facility.** Choose facilities that reduce transportation requirements due to proximity to airport, local and public transit, or activities associated with the event.
- Public Transportation and/or Carpooling.** Provide public transportation information and/or provide participants with public transportation tokens as part of their registration package to encourage the use of public transportation. Encourage carpooling.
- Green the Exhibitors & Vendors.** Recruit green vendors and encourage all vendors to stay with the green theme by minimizing wasteful giveaways wherever possible and use available recycling services. Educate the vendors on all recycling services and other green aspects of the event.
- Reusable Packing.** Encourage use of crates or cartons versus cardboard boxing when transporting supplies to reduce packaging materials.
- Estimate Your Carbon Footprint.** Flights, ground transportation and energy used are the main contributors to greenhouse gas emissions resulting from an event. Estimate the overall carbon footprint of the event by using a carbon calculator (ex: <http://www.terrapass.com/event-carbon-calculator/>)
- Green Energy.** Consider purchasing *Green Tags* or *Renewable Energy Certificates* to offset the added costs of using energy from renewable sources to power the event. See <http://www.green-e.org/>.
- Volunteerism.** Instead of other team-building or networking events, consider a learning exercise to plant trees, clean up a waterway or other environmentally-focused project.
- Training of Staff.** Ensure that a training program is in place to inform the workers of the facility's greening policies. The green event needs to "*walk the green walk*".
- Talk the Green Talk.** Let participants know about the efforts made to minimize the environmental impacts of the event with a green commitment section on the event webpage and through all email communications and other messaging.

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## GREENING THE FACILITY:

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- Optional Linen Service.** This should be offered by the lodging facility; and, staff should be properly instructed to ensure follow through.
- Recycling.** All recyclable materials should be recycled and collected in meeting rooms and guest rooms. Determine if containers are provided in rooms to collect recyclable materials, including paper, plastic, glass and aluminum. Collection bins should be highly visible and conveniently located for other, less common materials.
- Bulk Dispensers for Toiletries.** Encourage the use of refillable dispensers for toiletries (e.g., hand and shower soap, shampoo, conditioner, hand lotion); or, if facility provides toiletries in small quantities, encourage the facility to replace the containers only when they are empty or for a new guest.
- Energy Efficiency.** The use of energy efficient lighting and sensors should be encouraged. The use of compact fluorescents in rooms and in recessed can-lights is a good sign that the facility is doing what is practical to reduce energy costs. Facilities should be recycling all fluorescent lamps.

- Programmable & Controlled Thermostats.** Energy efficient and electronically controlled heating and air conditioning saves energy and money.
- Double-Sided Copies.** All bills and printed materials should be double-sided. Business center copiers and printers should be pre-set for double-side.
- Water-Conservation.** Low-flow toilets and water fixtures save water and there are many opportunities in landscaping, food service and laundry.
- High-Efficiency Hand-Dryers.** The use of high-efficiency hand-dryers saves energy and avoids paper towel waste. If composting, paper towels are compostable.
- Donate Excess Food.** An established relationship with local food banks will facilitate the donation of excess food and avoid wastes to landfill.

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## DURING THE EVENT:

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- Green Event Signage.** Signage should greet participants as they enter the event, listing all of the green practices featured by the event.
- Highly-Visible Recycling.** Work with event staff to ensure that recycling receptacles are available throughout the event, that they are clearly identified as recycling and that they are always located with/next to the trash receptacles.
- Monitor Recycling.** Food service and clean-up crews should be trained to recycle all recyclable materials from conferences, receptions, events, etc.
- Signage, Labeling & Placement.** Ensure recycling areas are well marked and displayed throughout the facility/event and are easily accessible.
- Reusable.** Dishes, glassware, silverware, table cloths and napkins. Many banquet tables are designed to be used without tablecloths.
- No Polystyrene.** Use china coffee mugs. If not, use paper or biodegradable materials for disposable cups and take-out containers.
- Minimize Disposables and/or Go Eco-Friendly.** Encourage use of bio-degradable disposables, which are now readily available for approximately the same costs.
- Compost.** Seriously consider composting if service is available. Up to 60% of waste weight can be from food wastes. Using compostable disposables will facilitate composting potential. Recycling plus composting can result in event landfill diversion rates of 90% or more.
- Eat Green.** Include vegetarian meals and have meals planned using local, seasonal produce.
- Avoid Box Lunches.** Boxed lunches generate a great deal of wastes from extra disposable packaging. If you must have box lunches, attempt to recycle boxes and other items.
- Pitchers.** Provide water and other beverages in pitchers or other bulk dispensers.
- Bulk Condiments.** Offer condiments in bulk dispensers.

- Save Energy.** Coordinate with meeting venue to ensure lights and air-conditioning are turned off when rooms are not in use.
- Green Port-o-Potties.** There are various new green substitutes for the traditional formaldehyde-based sterilization products.

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## AFTER THE EVENT:

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- Weigh & Measure.** To determine how effective the recycling and waste reduction efforts were, you must weigh and measure. Work with your waste management/recycling vendors to get weights or actually use a scale to weigh all wastes, recycling and other materials in order to calculate the percentage of wastes diverted from landfill.
- Recommend Improvements.** Once the event is over, assess the event and identify potential improvements and suggestions.
- Follow Up Electronically.** Provide all event proceedings and follow-up electronically via e-mail, an internet site and report on how green the event was.

Thank you for voluntarily committing to help reduce the impact of the tourism industry on the environment!

*Maryland Green Travel was developed in partnership by:*

