



February 2024

Reducing waste from events and services

Guidelines for single-use items

We acknowledge the Gadigal of the Eora Nation
as the Traditional Custodians of our local area.

CITY OF SYDNEY



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Upper Fort Street, Millers Point. Photo by Tyrone Branigan.

01 Zero waste vision

The City of Sydney is committed to environmental leadership. Our guiding documents Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision and Leave nothing to waste: strategy and action plan 2017-2030 set bold targets, including a long-term goal of zero waste to landfill.

Our long-term waste objectives are:

- to reduce the amount of waste produced
- to reuse and recycle as much as possible
- to treat what's left over in the most sustainable way.

The City of Sydney, through its Leave nothing to waste strategy and action plan, has a commitment to continuous improvement when it comes to reducing waste across all our operations including events.

The temporary nature of events can often increase our reliance on single-use items. These are typically products and packaging that we dispose of after one use. In many instances, these items are not recycled because the type of material used isn't recyclable and/or can't be collected separately.

The NSW Government has also passed the Plastic Reduction and Circular Economy Act 2021, which bans certain single-use plastics.

The City of Sydney has developed these guidelines to help employees, contractors and event managers understand how the NSW Government legislation impacts them and to find more sustainable alternatives to single-use items.



Picnic with reusable items at the Domain. Photo by Katherine Griffiths.

02 NSW Government single-use plastics ban

On 16 November 2021, the NSW Government passed the Plastic Reduction and Circular Economy Act 2021 which does 3 key things:

1. Bans the supply of certain single-use plastic items across NSW. Fines can apply.
2. Allows the regulator, the NSW Environment Protection Authority, to specify design standards for manufacturing of certain products.
3. Allows the government to impose a product stewardship framework for certain plastic products. This will make the manufacturers liable and responsible for recycling at the end of the life of the product.

03 The difference between the NSW Government single-use plastics ban and these guidelines

The NSW single-use plastics ban applies to everyone in NSW. Further details of the ban can be found on the NSW Government website.

The City of Sydney's approach is to go further and reduce the use of all single-use items where possible. We know that regardless of its material type, single-use items cannot be easily recycled and have negative impacts on our environment such as increased greenhouse gas emissions and litter.

04 Who the guidelines apply to

These guidelines apply to our employees, contractors and other entities using City of Sydney venues and outdoor spaces for services and events.

05 What activities they apply to

These guidelines apply to services, events, festivals, markets and programs delivered by the City of Sydney, and those delivered by other entities who hire venues or seek a permit for the use of outdoor venues.

Studies have shown that up to 1 million plastic drink bottles are purchased globally **every minute**. Less than 50% are collected for recycling and only 7% are turned back into new bottles.

06 Where do they apply

The guidelines apply to City of Sydney venues and outdoor spaces within the City of Sydney's local area except for places and land managed by other authorities and corporations including:

- Barangaroo Development Authority
- Botanic Gardens, Domain and Centennial Parklands Trust
- Department of Education and Communities
- Land and Housing Corporation
- NSW Maritime
- Property NSW
- Transport for NSW
- University of Sydney, University of Technology Sydney and Notre Dame University
- parts of Central Park
- International Square
- Westpac Plaza.

Some City venues may have existing tenancy agreements that do not require adherence to these guidelines.

All venues and spaces regardless of location or ownership will be subject to the NSW Government single-use ban.

07 Zero waste principles

The following 4 principles provide a framework for sustainable zero waste events:

- **Reduce/avoid:** The best environmental outcome is to reduce the amount of resources and products required in the first place. Leaflets, promotional materials and excess packaging should be avoided wherever possible.
- **Reuse:** Choosing items that can be used many times over will prevent unnecessary waste and often has a reduced carbon impact on the environment.
- **Recycle:** Where single-use items cannot be avoided, select items that are easy to collect and can be sent for recycling.
- **Recover:** Many materials cannot be recycled back into the same products. When materials are recovered they are often recycled into by-products, such as creating a secondary material for the construction industry or using the material to generate energy.



Reusable cup systems are a great way to avoid single-use items. Photo by Katherine Griffiths.

08 Phasing out single-use items

We are phasing out the use of single-use items in our buildings and events.

Subject to certain exceptions, **the following items should no longer be freely available on our properties and venues** without director approval:

- bottled water
- plastic straws
- plastic serveware including items made from expanded polystyrene
- plastic utensils
- promotional flyers
- plastic single-use sampling/giveaways
- single-use cups.

Use our online tool

Find the best alternatives to single-use items and how to buy them in our handy online tool: [Eliminate single-use online tool](#)

Bottled water and straw alternatives

Access to water

- Many City of Sydney properties and venues have access to free drinking water taps or fountains.
- Portable water refill stations are available from Sydney Water for local government community events (conditions apply).
- Events or set-ups operated by third parties can hire portable water units or purchase reusable water containers where convenient access to water is not available.

Drinking bottles and cups

- Where provided, use existing cups and glasses held at our properties and venues.
- Encourage employees and visitors to bring their own water bottles to venues and events through training and event advertising channels.
- Hire reusable cups.
- Cups made from expanded polystyrene are not permitted and have been banned in NSW since 1 November 2022.



Water fountain at Green Square Library.
Photo by Jessica Lindsay.

Additional considerations and exceptions

- The City of Sydney is committed to being inclusive and accessible for all. We understand the use of bottled water and plastic straws may be a requirement for some of our community and we will continue to provide bottled water and straws for those who require it.
- Consider including a small sign at your event: “We are committed to reducing the use of single-use plastics like bottles and straws. We also understand some people require them. If you need one, let us know. Thank you.”
- During extreme heat events, City of Sydney employees may need to distribute water in plastic bottles to vulnerable members of our community.
- Performers on stage may require bottles of water with a lid to prevent spills. Please choose reusable bottles where possible.
- Be mindful when selecting alternatives to plastic. Currently biodegradable and compostable plastics cannot be recycled.

- Soft drinks and sparkling water should be dispensed using postmix equipment. Plastic bottles are only permitted if alternatives are not available.
- Where new items must be provided, prioritise products made from recycled content and items that can be recycled at end of life.

Avoiding straws

- Single-use straws made from plastic, biodegradable plastic, compostable plastic and bioplastics are not permitted and have been banned in NSW since 1 November 2022. Exemptions apply for providing a plastic straw for people with a disability or medical need.
- Remove straws from drinks and counters and provide only when requested.
- Compostable alternatives to banned single-use plastic items are also banned. Paper straws will need to be disposed of in general waste. The best option is to avoid drinks that might require straws.



Summer Streets Glebe event. Photo by Katherine Griffiths.

Reducing plastic serveware and utensils

Avoidance and recycling

- Do not provide single-use plastic plates, bowls or utensils. Utensils, plates and bowls made from plastic, compostable plastic and bio-plastics are not permitted and have been banned in NSW since 1 November 2022.
- Do not provide single-use stirrers. Stirrers made from plastic, biodegradable plastic, compostable plastic and bioplastics are not permitted and have been banned in NSW since 1 November 2022.
- Consider providing finger food for events to reduce the need for serveware and utensils.
- Serve ice cream in cones rather than providing cups and plastic spoons.
- Serve condiments in large dispensers rather than individual sachets.
- Where provided, use existing reusable crockery and serveware held on site at City of Sydney properties and venues.
- Hire reusable serveware.
- Avoid all single-use items, including compostable items, which must be disposed of in general waste. Items contaminated with food will also need to be disposed of in general waste if they are not for reuse.
- Any remaining or surplus single-use plastic items cannot be used except in cases of exemption.

Additional considerations and exceptions

- Some plastic items are exempt from the bans where there is no safe alternative reusable item. This includes items for medical reasons. Further details can be found on the NSW Environmental Protection Authority website.
- The NSW ban does not apply to single-use plastic bowls designed to have a spill-proof lid, such as those used for a takeaway soup.

Reducing single-use cups

- Encourage employees and community members through event marketing and education to take reusable coffee cups to cafes, venues and events. Consider adding the following statement in your pre-event communications:
“The City of Sydney is committed to reducing avoidable waste. Help us reduce the environmental impact of our event by remembering your own water bottles and coffee cups.”
- Require vendors at City of Sydney events to provide returnable coffee cups.
- Hire returnable coffee cups for events.

Additional considerations and exceptions

- Avoid all single-use items including compostable items, which must be disposed of in general waste. Items contaminated with food will also need to be disposed of in general waste if they are not for reuse.
- Cups made from expanded polystyrene have been banned in NSW since 1 November 2022.
- Biodegradable plastic is not currently recyclable, even when made from plant-based materials and **cannot** be recycled in the yellow lid bin for medical purposes.

Reducing plastic bags

The supply of lightweight plastic bags has been banned in NSW since 1 June 2022.

A lightweight plastic bag is less than 35 microns thick at any part of the bag. The ban also applies to bags only partly made of plastic.

Lightweight bags made from biodegradable plastics, compostable plastics and bioplastics are also banned. This includes bags made from Australian certified compostable plastic.

The ban does not apply to barrier bags such as:

- produce bags and deli bags
- bin liners
- human or animal waste bags (including nappy or dog poo bags)
- bags used to contain items for medical purposes.

Avoidance and recycling

- Encourage the use of reusable bags or containers and put reminders in marketing materials.
- Consider reusing leftover delivery boxes and offering them to customers instead of single-use plastic or paper bags.
- Before procuring or commissioning bags, consider the environmental impact of paper and cotton bags and opt for sustainably sourced bags that are recyclable.



Commercial flyers, sampling and giveaways

Avoidance and recycling

- You cannot distribute promotional flyers and leaflets at outdoor events. Please promote your events and services using digital services.
- Some government information leaflets are allowed when they assist members of our community. The City of Sydney must approve these. Ensure you distribute these responsibly and use recycled paper.
- Single-use items and excessively packaged items are not permitted. All sponsor giveaways need prior approval.
- Gift bags at events should be made from reusable materials and the contents, where possible, should not be made from plastic.

09 Additional resources

Reference materials to help understand the NSW legislation and impact of different consumable items:

[NSW EPA information about the single-use plastics ban](#)

[Understanding plastic packaging and the language we use to describe it](#)

[Greenhouse gas impacts of disposable vs reusable foodservice products](#)

[Food organics and garden organics \(FOGO\) information](#)

10 Example suppliers

Go to our [Eliminate single-use online tool](#) to view a list of suppliers.

11 Glossary

Recycling - Recycling is the process of converting waste materials into the same or new materials and objects.

Reusable - Items that can be used, cleaned and reused many times over.

Serveware - Items used to serve food and beverages.

Single-use items - Products and packaging that are typically disposed after one use.

Zero waste - The conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of all products, packaging, and materials without burning them, and without discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health.