



Zürich,
Switzerland.

WIPE OUT WASTE:

your toolkit for circular events





Introduction

Tackling waste and resource management is one of the big challenges facing every industry right now, not least the events world. According to the United Nations, the waste sector is contributing significantly to the global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Business events play their part in this by generating large amounts of waste, from paperwork and products to leftover food and drink. Studies suggest that waste is responsible for between 10% and 30% of an event's overall carbon footprint.

2.24bn tonnes

of municipal solid waste is generated annually worldwide



Thankfully, times are changing, and we're all becoming more conscious of the environmental impacts of business travel and events. Research by C&IT and the Zurich Convention Bureau shows that 95.6% of event industry professionals are now influenced by sustainability when choosing venues and destinations. Yet at a recent industry co-produced roundtable, none of the participants had ever planned a fully zero-waste event. To help event professionals reduce waste and improve resource management, we've put together this practical toolkit drawing on expertise from Zurich. "The city of Zurich is already rated among the world's most sustainable destinations, and we have an ambitious sustainability strategy, which includes reducing the waste generated by events to a minimum by 2030," says Lara Gallmann, the bureau's sustainability manager. "In this guide, you'll find plenty of actionable ideas, tips and examples of best practice that draw on the principles of the circular economy."

Up to 14m tonnes

of plastic waste lies at the bottom of the world's oceans



The typical conference attendee produces:

1.89kg of waste per day
(176.67kg of CO₂e emissions per day)

1.16kg of which ends up in landfill



The circular economy

At this point, you've probably already heard a fair amount about the circular economy. "Essentially, it's all about replacing the old model of how we produce and consume resources – often referred to as 'take-make-use-dispose' – in favour of an approach that uses fewer resources in the first place, manages those resources efficiently, and aims to keep them in circulation for as long as possible," says Gallmann.

When it comes to dealing with waste, the principles of the circular economy can be summed up in five 'Rs':



Refuse

Say no upfront to materials, equipment and products that are not absolutely necessary. Avoid single-use packaging and non-recyclable items and only say yes to durable, high-quality products that can be reused.



Reduce

Use less overall – particularly wasteful, polluting or non-recyclable items – and only order the minimum you need. Lower your consumption of everyday items such as paper and food, and choose packaging-free products to reduce waste.



Reuse

Borrow or lease products and equipment if possible, rather than buying it. Opt for reusable rather than disposable items, and give away or sell items you no longer need.



Repurpose

Don't just throw away used or defective items – repair, repurpose or upcycle them instead.



Recycle/rot

Dispose of unavoidable waste correctly, by recycling as much as possible. If materials can't be reused or recycled, make sure they're biodegradable, and compost kitchen waste.



"It's about replacing the old model of how we consume resources with one that manages resources efficiently and keeps them in circulation for as long as possible."

Lara Gallmann, Zurich Convention Bureau

Some of these circular-economy principles may sound simple, but often they challenge the ways in which events have been planned and implemented for many years. The good news is that if we put these strategies into practice, they bring all kind of benefits for event organisers:

Why implement circular-economy strategies?

- Reduce the environmental impacts of your event
- Lower your procurement and, potentially, waste-disposal costs (for example, in Switzerland, the disposal of glass, paper, compost and PET bottles and other recyclables is free, but the disposal of unsorted waste is charged)
- Increase satisfaction among sustainability-conscious participants.
- Improve the image of the event among the local population and the media
- Maintain the attractiveness of your events as a 'future-ready' area of enterprise
- Meet the increasing expectations of customers, governments and investors
- Support UN Sustainable Development Goal 12 through the prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse of waste



Practical ways to beat waste

Taking the first steps towards more circular events doesn't have to be complicated. "Starting with easy-to-implement solutions is better than not starting at all," says Gallmann. "Your first question should always be, 'do I really need this product or item? Is it essential to the success of the event?'"

Here, we look at just a few of the practical measures you can take to reduce waste to a minimum and lower the overall environmental footprint of your event.

Streamline communication

■ Eliminate unnecessary event merchandising, printed materials and branding from your event. Send out materials and info to participants in a digital format beforehand – it might be worth setting up an event app, especially for recurring events. If you need to display your branding on the day, invest in posters and banners that aren't time-sensitive so

can be used on multiple occasions, or make use of digital displays and signage.

■ Similarly, avoid printing up a raft of stickers, signage, flyers, menu cards, printed programmes or other event collateral that's likely to end up in the bin. Offer more sustainable alternatives – whether that's a downloadable digital programme or writing the menu on a slate.

■ If using delegate badges, replace the throwaway plastic or laminated kind with more sustainable options, such as double-sided paper badges. On the reverse side, you could print useful information, such as a mini-programme or QR code linking to your event website.

■ Consider quirky ways to get your messaging out there. For example, rather than printing up programmes, provide fruit with a QR code on it that links to your event itinerary.



"Starting with easy-to-implement solutions is better than not starting at all. Your first question should always be, 'do I really need this product or item?'"

Lara Gallmann, Zurich Convention Bureau

Rethink giveaways

■ Do without product giveaways if you can. After all, how often do delegates really value a free promotional pen or keyring?

■ Consider less materialistic giveaways and souvenirs that last. For example, you could put together a virtual 'goody bag' with vouchers for a local boat trip or zero-waste online cooking class, discounts at partner hotels or a Spotify playlist for the event.

■ If you want to give branded products to attendees, opt for edible options that support the local economy, such as locally produced honey or jam, or other sustainably produced gifts, such as wildflower seed cards.

■ Think about how to hold onto memories, rather than objects. If you only print one

thing at the event, make it something guests will actually want to keep, such as an optional souvenir photo from an event photo booth.

Greener gastronomy

■ You may already avoid single-use packaging, provide reusable bottles and glasses, and offer water fountains for refills. You could also opt for suppliers that avoid unnecessary packaging, such as individual throwaway wrappers, and use sustainable materials. Ask if they deliver produce in reusable containers, such as boxes that can also be used to display fruit or bread.

■ Think carefully about how much food you really need at your event. If your venue offers a la carte dining to groups, only ordering food on request could be less wasteful than providing a buffet or three-course set menu.

Or offering a choice of large or small mains will cater for different appetites, while reducing leftovers.

■ Work with venues and caterers to ensure the rest of the dining experience is as sustainable as the food. Opt for reusable utensils and tableware, and washable tablecloths and napkins. Ask whether leftovers will be redistributed or composted, rather than thrown away.

■ Choose event partners who get creative with food that might otherwise be wasted. For example, Zurich dining institution Café Boy offers a surprise 'Whatever there is' dish made from their lunchtime leftovers; or Swiss caterer Zum guten Heinrich offers high-quality event catering using wonky fruit and veg that would generally go unused.



Case study: Foodsharing

If holding a business event in Switzerland, you could have uneaten food collected and shared with the wider community by **Foodsharing**, a growing international movement working to end food waste. Their dedicated 'food rescuers' will redistribute leftovers to community organisations, food banks, soup kitchens and local people, as well as leaving items in public fridges for those in need to help themselves. Its Zurich arm offers three of these collection points for the local community.



Sustainable materials

■ There are plenty of ways to set the scene at your event without opting for single-use decorative items such as cut flowers, balloons or candles. Instead, consider decorating your event space with natural and/or reusable materials such as fruit and vegetables, dried flowers, branches, stones or herbs in pots.

■ Borrow or rent any additional equipment you need, such as furniture and appliances. Second-hand materials are generally more economical as well as less wasteful.

■ Consider whether you could reuse any materials, such as leftover packaging or reusable badges and lanyards, at future events. Or donate reusable materials and equipment to an organisation such as Zurich's Give & Take initiative, which redistributes unwanted items to the general public.

■ Ensure that any recyclable or reusable items such as PET plastic, paper, glass and aluminium will be collected after the event. Provide ample recycling stations so that attendees can get involved in sorting waste.



■ Collaborate with your event partners to ensure waste is treated as a resource. Innovative Zurich hotel venues such as **Hotel Felix** are converting food waste into biogas to produce energy, while the Zwingli Pilz project uses leftover coffee grounds from the catering sector to help grow mushrooms.

Thoughtful activities

■ Plan sustainable excursions and activities for your attendees that won't generate additional waste, such as an upcycling workshop or zero-waste cookery course. In Zurich, groups can take part in an inspirational team cooking session with *dieCuisine*, using sustainable local ingredients to cook up a feast that is shared not only with the participants, but also with people living on the streets.

Committed partners

■ Throughout the event planning process, prioritise venues and local service providers with a clear commitment to circular waste-management practices.

Case study: Dolder Hotel AG

Zurich's Dolder Hotel AG group, whose properties include The Dolder Grand five-star hotel, is one of Switzerland's leading sustainable accommodation providers. As part of its war on waste, the group has digitised arrivals and departures to save around 20,000 sheets of paper each year, while its leftover food is processed into biogas to generate energy. Used guest soaps are donated to the non-profit organisation *SapoCycle* to be recycled and distributed to families in need. The group's commitment to ending waste is also evident in details such as using long-lasting pot plants rather than cut flowers to decorate rooms.





Success factors

What are the essential ingredients you will need to create a truly effective circular event?

There are three key elements to ensuring success, says Gallmann:

1. Planning beforehand

Preparation is key to all successful events, particularly those with a zero-waste agenda. Every decision you make in the planning phase will have an impact on how many resources are used and how much waste is generated at your event, from the venues and suppliers you partner with, to the choice of menus, activities and decoration. Be creative! To stay on track, think about the ultimate purpose of your event. Don't get bogged down in the materialistic elements such as decoration and branding; shift your focus onto the quality, meaningful

content you want to provide, from speakers to experiences.

2. Involving participants

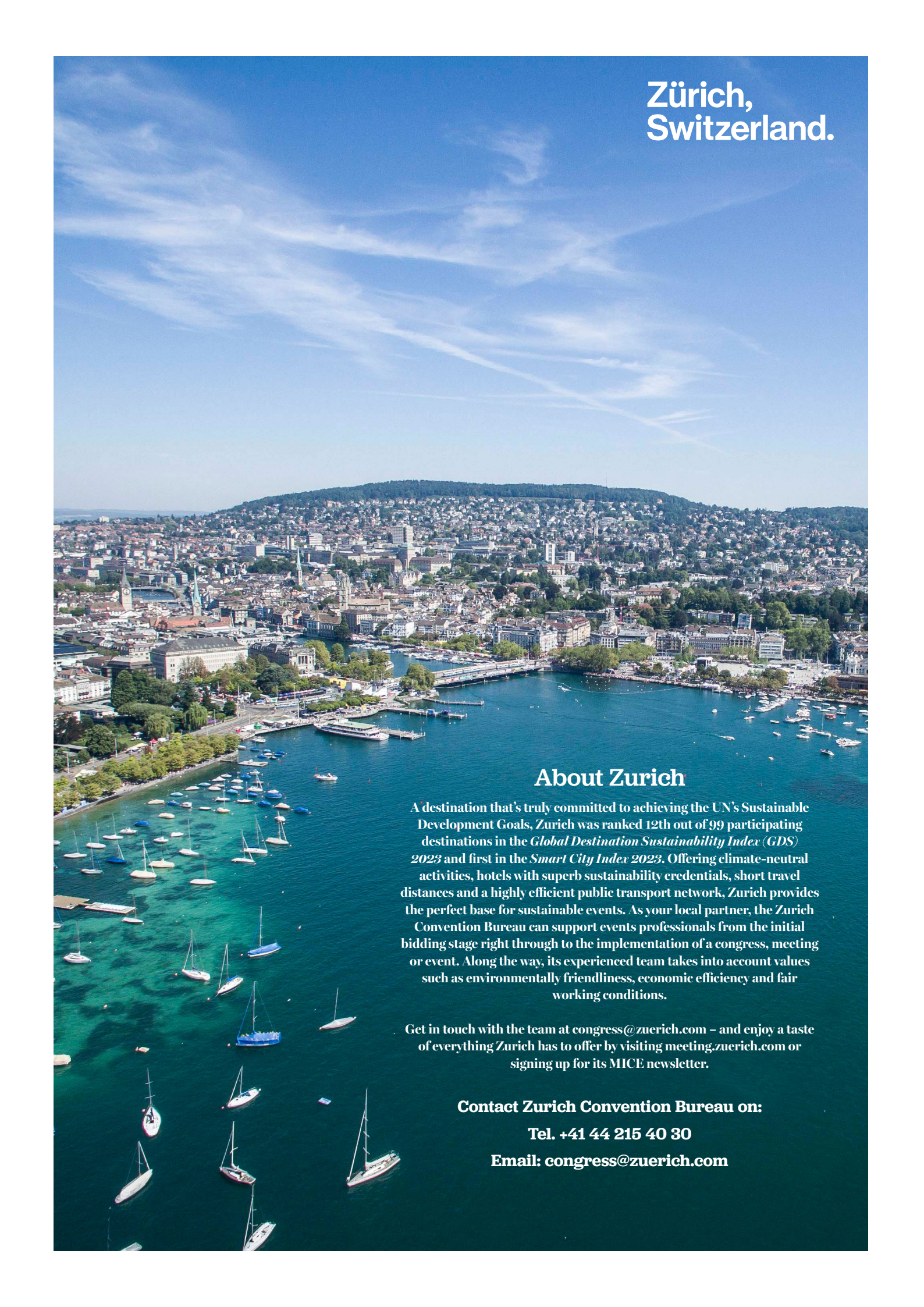
Communicate your zero-waste aspirations to participants before and during the event. Everyone should know about the circular event concept, understand the reasons for reducing waste, and feel motivated to be part of that mission.



Sharing these values with attendees and encouraging them to play their part will maximise your positive impacts.

3. Reporting and evaluation

Make sure you measure quantitative data on waste and resource recovery post-event, such as how much rubbish was recycled or sent to landfill. These insights will help show what worked, and what didn't. Don't forget to let event participants know how much their efforts have contributed to reducing waste, to increase engagement and participation in future. But be honest and open about any goals that couldn't be reached – sharing both good and bad experiences encourages trust and candour, and may provide further learnings. Be sure to analyse feedback from event attendees, speakers and stakeholders that may yield additional insights for the future.



Zürich, Switzerland.

About Zurich

A destination that's truly committed to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, Zurich was ranked 12th out of 99 participating destinations in the *Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS) 2023* and first in the *Smart City Index 2023*. Offering climate-neutral activities, hotels with superb sustainability credentials, short travel distances and a highly efficient public transport network, Zurich provides the perfect base for sustainable events. As your local partner, the Zurich Convention Bureau can support events professionals from the initial bidding stage right through to the implementation of a congress, meeting or event. Along the way, its experienced team takes into account values such as environmentally friendliness, economic efficiency and fair working conditions.

Get in touch with the team at congress@zuerich.com – and enjoy a taste of everything Zurich has to offer by visiting meeting.zuerich.com or signing up for its MICE newsletter.

Contact Zurich Convention Bureau on:

Tel. +41 44 215 40 30

Email: congress@zuerich.com