

TOWARDS ZERO WASTE FESTIVALS

Overcoming Current Challenges in Sustainable Waste Management at UK Greenfield Events

Executive Summary of Report



BACKGROUND

The annual Outdoor Event Industry Green Survey, published by Vision:2025 since 2015, has consistently shown that, though festival organisers are motivated to prioritise waste management and reduction, they face common challenges. This has led Vision:2025 to focus on this topic to support improved understanding and efficiency of waste management practices at events.

Resource Futures, a national waste and resources consultancy, was commissioned in 2022 by Vision:2025 and Julie's Bicycle to help understand the challenges and opportunities for sustainable waste management at UK greenfield festivals, and provide solutions-focused recommendations for events and the industry.

The report is the result of a literature review, in-depth stakeholder interviews, specialist knowledge from Resource Futures, and input from an industry working group.

ABOUT

Vision:2025 is the environmental steering group for the UK's outdoor events industry, and a network of outdoor events and businesses taking climate action. We undertake industry research, provide free-to-access resources, tools and a sustainable suppliers directory.

www.vision2025.org.uk

Julie's Bicycle is a pioneering charity, mobilising the arts and culture to take action on the climate and ecological crisis.

juliesbicycle.com

Resource Futures are a national waste and resources specialist consultancy. They work with business, governments, local authorities and communities to minimise the impact of production and consumption through reduction, reuse, recycling and circular business models.

www.resourcefutures.co.uk

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Native Events

National Eisteddfod of Wales

Festival Republic/Live Nation

INSIGHTS: THE LANDSCAPE AHEAD

- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policy, expected to be passed into UK law by 2025, will make producers liable for the expenses associated with managing their products after their initial intended use.
- A national Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) on drinks containers will come into effect by October 2025 for PET plastic 50ml-3L containers and cans.
- The impact of DRS and EPR within a festival environment remains uncertain, for example in terms of how consumers will redeem their deposits.
- The recently released national Environment Improvement Plan 2023 includes a plan to eliminate biodegradable waste to landfill
- There is a growing market for separated recyclable materials
- Most of the nations within the UK are failing to currently meet the minimum 65% recycling target set by the EU, with the exception of Wales. Festival industry research suggests that UK festivals on average achieve a 32% recycling rate.



KEY CHALLENGES FOR FESTIVALS AND OUTDOOR EVENTS

- A knowledge gap exists regarding what data can be requested and expected from waste contractors, and how to make strategic decisions to improve sustainability based on data that is received.
- Data received by waste contractors is often slow to arrive and of poor quality, making it hard for events to monitor, evaluate and improve waste management.
- A lack of standardised bin labelling and signage across the industry has caused confusion among audiences and staff members, leading to contamination of recyclable materials.
- Uncertainty from the packaging industry about the level of recyclability of materials, and the availability of processing facilities for compostable materials has caused confusion and increased the risk of greenwashing claims regarding some materials.
- Greenwashing: Suggestive messaging and wording from the packaging industry about the level of recyclability and compostability of materials, including failing to be transparent about available processing facilities for compostable materials, is causing confusion.

QUICK WINS

Separating food waste




Organic (food) waste is accepted in almost all areas, and can be easily achievable in an outdoor event setting. Composting 1 tonne of food waste avoids 618kg CO₂e in comparison to landfilling.

Compulsory waste data reporting and baseline setting

Including the capture and provision of waste data within waste contractor agreements is essential. With this data the quantity of different materials used can be identified, baselines can be established, and reduction strategies can be implemented and monitored the following year.

Eliminating waste and maximising reuse



Banning problem materials such as plastic, encouraging the reuse of hard plastic cups and having deposit return schemes, can tackle single-use and reduce volumes of waste being generated. The environmental benefit of reusable cups is achieved when they are used more than five times.

Materials policy



Creating a simple materials policy (i.e. a list of materials permitted and not permitted onsite) based on what can be managed and recycled at your event and in the area is an important and easy step. Share the policy with all stakeholders to help avoid the use of problem materials.

Strategic placement and emptying of bins matters



Bins placed in areas where they are needed, such as food zones and busy thoroughfares, will make it easier for waste to be captured with less contamination. Festival management teams should have more oversight of the frequency of bin emptying and can specify that they are emptied at peak-use to ensure they are never over capacity. Overflowing bins lead to littering and 'waste dumping'.

Audience communications impact behaviour onsite

Sending out clear sustainability messages to attendees that prepare them for the ethos of the festival and expectations for managing materials makes a difference. Encourage reusable items and reassure attendees that infrastructure is in place to support reuse e.g. refill stations for water bottles.

RECOMMENDATIONS: NEXT STEPS FOR THE UK FESTIVAL AND OUTDOOR EVENTS INDUSTRY

The Festival and Outdoor Events Industry Working Group for Waste, set up to support the Towards Zero Waste Festivals Project, will continue to meet in 2023 to steer this work going forward in consideration of recommendations in the report:

- › **Establish a standard model for waste data reporting at UK outdoor events**
- › **Expand the industry working group by engaging other stakeholders, such as waste companies, litter-picking organisations and waste brokers, to foster a collaborative approach to exploring manageable solutions**
- › **Capitalise on the festival event season to gather data to enrich research initiatives and share experiences**
- › **Explore the benefits of a standardised approach and methodology to such challenges as bin labelling, waste contracts and assessing the most effective onsite systems.**
- › **Carry out regular industry information sharing events, engaging waste and resources experts to troubleshoot common themes**

To download the full 34-page Toward Zero Waste Festivals report, please click [here](#)