

An EARTH DAY guide

TOWARDS A ZERO WASTE BUSINESS

A practical guide to understanding Zero Waste, addressing increasing waste and costs, and remaining competitive in a global economy.





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UN Calls for Urgent Global Shift to Zero Waste

According to the *Global Waste Management Outlook 2024* report, if nothing is done, by 2050, municipal solid waste generation is predicted to grow to:



3.8 billion metric tons

...with costs doubling to

US \$640.3 billion



What does this mean for businesses?

With waste recognized as an alarming global problem, the pressure on countries and cities to reduce waste will reach every business that operates around the world.

Businesses that want to remain competitive globally will need to heed the UN's call for an urgent shift to Zero Waste.

Largest Study of Commercial Waste Reveals Opportunities for Businesses



Note: Material breakdown by weight

- Data from 100+ waste audits conducted globally
- 170,000+ pounds of waste analyzed

Download: [Waste Characterization Study](#)

How Does Your Business Compare?

Top 3 Findings of Global Waste Study



Trash is the **LARGEST** waste stream

The majority of an average building's waste ended up in the trash to be landfilled or incinerated, rather than being diverted.

- *Are you losing value by sending recyclable materials to the landfill?*



62 percent of “Trash” is **NOT** trash at all

A staggering 62 percent of material found in the trash stream of buildings in the study was made up of materials that could be diverted.

- *Like most buildings, are you paying more for waste removal, and to send more materials to the landfill and incineration than you need to?*



Organics is the **biggest missed opportunity**

Organic material—at 36%—consistently made up the largest portion of divertable material found in a building's trash stream.

- *Are you missing the biggest opportunity to reduce waste by ignoring organics?*



What is Zero Waste?

As officially defined by the Zero Waste International Alliance (ZWIA), Zero Waste is:

“The conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health.”

In practical terms, Zero Waste is the act of producing less waste through prioritizing waste reduction, as well as reuse, resource efficiency, and recycling with the ultimate goal of closing that loop.

In other words, Zero Waste is **efficient waste management.**

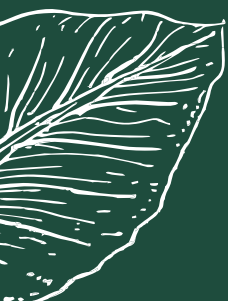


Clarifying Zero Waste Misconceptions

A lack of clarity about what Zero Waste really means may be keeping some businesses from reaping its benefits.

- Zero Waste does NOT mean that your business will be under pressure to produce no waste at all immediately.
- Zero Waste is NOT just about recycling.
- Zero Waste is NOT too expensive for businesses.

ZERO WASTE IS A PLAN that businesses commit to putting in place to deal seriously with waste. That plan can be tailored to fit each business's needs and timetable, and is achievable for businesses large and small.





Benefits of Zero Waste



Manage Rising Costs

With inflation, rising labor and materials costs, increasing landfill tipping fees, regulations, and other factors, the cost of waste removal is expected to keep rising. Reducing waste is the only effective approach to controlling rising waste costs.

Rescue Loss Value



Waste = Loss Value. Zero Waste strategies will help businesses rescue the value in what they are landfilling.



Get Ahead Of The Competition

Businesses that ignore Zero Waste will pay higher costs in waste removal, incur a bigger carbon footprint, and suffer in their corporate social responsibility reputation, ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) investor ratings, as well as employee/customer goodwill. In the long run, they will slip behind in operational efficiency and become less competitive.



Lower Environmental Costs

In the drive to use less, Zero Waste strategies contribute to resource conservation.



How to Become a Zero Waste Business

This 5-step guide to Zero Waste was developed to provide simple, actionable ways for your business to get started on your Zero Waste journey.

Each action within the roadmap can be completed independently of the other actions, we recommend following the order laid out to help reinforce Zero Waste-inspired themes that build on each other.

Each action comes with tips and resources to help your business move towards Zero Waste.

Reach out to your Great Forest representative if you have questions, or would like to build a customized Zero Waste plan that fits your business's needs and timeline.



5 Steps to a Zero Waste Business

1 Take stock of your Zero Waste journey.



2 Rethink and redesign your approach to waste.



3 Maintain Legal Compliance.



4 Reduce your consumption of disposables.



5 Address Organics.



1 Take stock of your Zero Waste journey.



Conduct a waste audit to assess your waste footprint. Determining the amount and types of waste your business generates is crucial to understanding how to rethink it.

A waste audit also establishes benchmarks that allow you to track your waste and set goals for all aspects of your business, from purchasing to disposal.

Learn more:

- [*Waste Audit Facts and Benefits: What Every Business Needs To Know*](#)

2 Rethink and redesign your approach to waste.



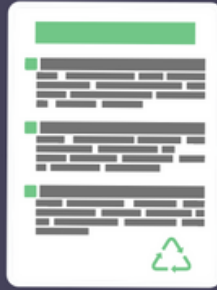
Rethink the way your business views waste, and redesign your approach to support the circular economy over the harvesting and use of virgin materials.

To achieve Zero Waste, businesses must adopt a Zero Waste mindset and create a culture shift in the workplace.

Learn more:

- [*Zero Waste toolkit*](#)
- [*3 Strategies to go Zero Waste*](#)
- [*Going Zero Waste: How Small Steps Add Up*](#)
- [*Rethinking Recycling: One Company's View*](#)

3 Maintain Legal Compliance.



Maintaining legal waste compliance is a valuable business tool. Because regulations are often mandated to help reach local and national sustainability goals, they offer a blueprint that can guide businesses toward greater sustainability and less waste.

Learn more:

- [*Managing Waste Sustainably: A Regulatory Compliance Guide for Businesses.*](#)

4 Reduce your consumption of disposables.



Identify single-use items in your facility and transition to reusable alternatives. Explore opportunities to reduce waste upstream and encourage suppliers to transition to durables.

Learn more:

- [*Compostable Food Service Ware: Is It Right For Your Business?*](#)
- [*Say No To Plastic Straws*](#)

5 Address Organics.



The largest study of commercial waste found that organic material—at 36%—consistently made up the largest portion of divertable material found in a building’s trash stream. Addressing organics, including food waste, through reduction, donation, and diversion is the biggest opportunity for many businesses.

Learn more:

- [*Food Waste Toolkit for Businesses*](#)
- [*Organics Recycling For Businesses and Organizations: A Guide To Costs and Other Considerations*](#)
- [*Food Waste Audits: How Restaurants can Fight Food Waste and Hunger at the Same Time.*](#)



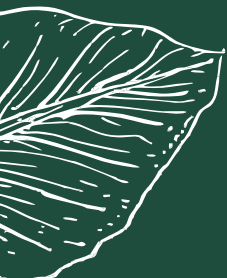
To Certify or Not to Certify?

Businesses can reap many of the benefits of Zero Waste strategies without applying for **TRUE Zero Waste certification**. However, taking that extra step to achieve certification demonstrates a level of commitment and success that will resonate with business stakeholders and positively impact investor ratings and sustainability reporting.

At a minimum, TRUE certification requires a 90 percent diversion rate from landfills among other Zero Waste-related credits.

Learn more:

- [Guide to TRUE Zero Waste Certification](#)
- [TRUE Zero Waste Case Study](#)





RESOURCES

Visit greatforest.com to sign up for *3 to Zero (Waste)*, a newsletter that delivers 3 tips a month to help you reduce waste, save money, and be more sustainable in your business, building, beyond.

Explore our [knowledge hub](#) to access more resources on Zero Waste and other sustainability solutions, including:

- [Case Studies](#)
- [GHG Emissions From Waste Calculator](#)
- [Lessons from the World's Trash](#)
- [Zero Waste toolkit](#)
- [Food Waste Toolkit](#)
- [Compliance Guide](#)
- [Organics Guide](#)
- [Study on Global Commercial Waste](#)
- [Waste Audit Facts](#)
- [Transforming Waste: A Guide to Donating for Reuse](#)
- [Compostable Food Service Ware](#)
- [TRUE Zero Waste Certification Guide](#)
- [Zero Waste Event Planning Guide](#)
- [20 Waste Reduction and Recycling Tips](#)
- [How do Companies Celebrate Earth Day?](#)

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