

# Be a Trash Free Restaurant!

Plastic pollution is an increasingly complex problem with dangerous ramifications for the safety of drinking water, aquatic ecosystems, and public health. Twenty-three percent of plastic materials in landfills in the United States come from food containers and food packaging,<sup>1</sup> and it makes up as much as 80 percent of the trash collected from the Anacostia River and Baltimore Harbor. Put another way, 269,000 tons of plastic pollution are from takeout orders with utensils like cups, plates, straws, and plastic silverware.<sup>2</sup>

**Food businesses have a responsibility to reduce their contribution to plastic waste and, as the technology evolves, it is becoming easier for them to do so.**

## Key stats on plastic pollution and food businesses:

- 7 of 10 categories of plastic waste are single-use plastics like plates, straws, cups, and bags.<sup>3</sup>
- Plastic packaging is the fastest growing segment of packaging and less than 14 percent of it can be recycled.<sup>4</sup>
- Americans use more than 100 million pieces of plastic utensils every day and that plastic either lives forever in a landfill, burns in an incinerator, or ends up in the environment contaminating soil and wildlife.<sup>5</sup>
- Americans throw away 500 million plastic straws each day.<sup>6</sup>
- Companies waste about \$11.4 billion annually in savings by not incorporating recycling into their packaging choices.<sup>7</sup>

While these statistics are staggering, there is hope for food businesses looking to reduce their plastic footprint and lead the movement to decrease plastic pollution. A variety of guides, resources, and lists provide step-by-step tips to phasing out unnecessary single-use plastic and phasing in recyclable and compostable alternatives—that are becoming more cost-effective as more businesses convert.

## Tips and tools for food businesses looking to prevent plastic pollution:

- Identify the different streams of waste generated.
- Assess the input and output of waste generated.
  - Use this baseline data to determine opportunities for waste reduction.
- Assess and track usage of single-use plastics.
- Identify which items are crucial and which can be phased out entirely.
- Identify which products can come in reusable packaging.
  - Seek out products in containers the supplier can take back.
  - Seek out reusable serviceware.
- Switch to bulk purchasing when applicable.
- Create a “bring your own” container program.
- Work with local community members and organizations to create incentives for businesses taking steps to decrease their plastic pollution.
- Purchase recyclable and compostable serviceware. Flip the page for resources!

# Resources

## Prince George's County Guide to Suppliers of recyclable and compostable food serviceware

<http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/15360>

## Responsible Purchasing Guide (see pages 43 and 44 in particular)

[https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/green-pur-ems1a3a\\_1.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/green-pur-ems1a3a_1.pdf)

## An Organizational Guide to Pollution Prevention

<https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-01/documents/organizationalguide.pdf>

## Maryland's Department of Environment's Green Registry

A registry of Maryland businesses implementing green waste management, water and energy conservation, and green building practices. A wonderful local resource to model food businesses off of!

<http://mde.maryland.gov/MarylandGreen/Pages/GreenMembersList.aspx>

## Maryland Green Travel Restaurant Partners

A partnership between Maryland Office of Tourism, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Maryland Tourism Coalition and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources developed the Maryland Green Travel Program to highlight and identify tourism businesses with green practices. The Maryland Green Travel Restaurant registry specifically highlights food businesses.

<http://industry.visitmaryland.org/tourism-partners/maryland-green-travel/maryland-green-travel-restaurant-partners/>

## The SFTool Product Search

A resource businesses can use to assist in sustainable purchasing practices.

<https://sftool.ecomedes.com/>

**Plastic pollution is a daunting issue, but as we continue to raise awareness and share resources, businesses play a unique role in combatting and reducing plastic pollution. Be a leader in your community and take steps today to reduce your plastic footprint!**

Sources: 1. [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/reducing\\_wasted\\_food\\_pkg\\_tool.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/reducing_wasted_food_pkg_tool.pdf) 2. <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/peter-lehner/fast-food-trash-nation-time-cut-down-packaging-waste> 3. <https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/international-coastal-cleanup/> 4. <http://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/plastic-free-eateries/> 5. <http://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/plastic-free-eateries/> 6. <http://www.ecocycle.org/bestrawfree/faqs> 7. <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/consumer-goods-packaging-report.pdf>

Tipsheet prepared by Trash Free Maryland, a nonprofit organization developing long-term solutions to trash pollution in Maryland's neighborhoods and waterways. For more information, visit [www.trashfreemaryland.org](http://www.trashfreemaryland.org) or email [info@trashfreemaryland.org](mailto:info@trashfreemaryland.org).

