Zero Waste Toolkit for Restaurants

A Practical Guide to Reducing Waste and Complying with Local Requirements

City of Encinitas

For questions about this guide or other recycling compliance questions, contact recycling@encinitasca.gov

INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is designed to make compliance with state and local recycling requirements simple while helping you **save money and increase your operational efficiency.** You have *two* ways to use this toolkit:

Quick Solutions

Take a flexible approach, tackling pressing challenges through targeted solutions. Each section works independently, letting you implement what fits your priorities and budget.

6-Step Roadmap

Work through this step-by-step guide to create a comprehensive waste management system tailored to your business.

WHY IT WORKS

- ✓ **Compliance Made Simple**
  Recommendations align with current regulations and are designed to support your business in achieving and maintaining compliance with local ordinances. This guide will be updated as needed to incorporate regulatory updates and product guides. For reference, the minimum compliance requirements are provided in this guide.

- ✓ **Built for Your Bottom Line**
  Beyond compliance, reducing waste can save you money.

THE 6 STEPS TO SUCCESS

STEP 1: GO REUSABLE OR COMPOSTABLE
STEP 2: IMPROVE RECYCLING
STEP 3: REDUCE FOOD WASTE
STEP 4: GET THE MOST FROM YOUR GREEN ORGANICS BIN
STEP 5: RIGHT-SIZE YOUR COLLECTION SERVICE
STEP 6: SHARE YOUR STORY

STEP 1: GO REUSABLE OR COMPOSTABLE

Choose the service ware strategy that fits your operation - both reusable and compostable options can offer significant improvements over conventional single-use plastic items while supporting regulatory compliance.

This guide includes **two options** to transition away from single-use plastic service ware:

- **Switching to reusable service ware** - transforms supply costs into a one-time investment that typically pays for itself in less than 12 months, then generates ongoing savings. This can also simplify sorting for customers and staff to help maximize your diversion of waste from landfills.
- **Switching to compostable service ware** - maximizes your organics recycling service, can simplify sorting for customers and employees, and diverts waste from landfills.

Both approaches reduce environmental impact, improve compliance, and can provide cost benefits depending on your restaurant's operational priorities and constraints.

Option 1. Switch to Reusable Service Ware

TIME ESTIMATION	
Phase	**Time Required**
Research & Planning	3-4 hours
Initial Setup	2-3 hours
Staff Training	45 minutes
Adjustment Period	1-2 weeks

WHAT'S REQUIRED

- Businesses are required to source separate materials into the proper recycling, organics, and trash containers per E.M.C. 11.23.040 (B).
- Disposable service ware made from expanded polystyrene (Styrofoam) is prohibited per E.M.C. 11.27.040.
- Plastic straws are prohibited per E.M.C. 11.27.060.
- Restaurants are not required to switch to reusable service ware, but it can significantly reduce waste and simplify the waste sorting process for customers and/or staff.
- Per the San Diego County Food Facility Plan[1], restaurants can successfully transition to reusables by following California health code guidelines. This includes proper sanitization using either a 3-compartment sink or NSF/ANSI Standard 3 approved dishwashing machines, and adherence to protocols for both establishment-provided reusables and customer-brought containers.

COMPLIANCE TIPS

- You can use reusable service ware and to-go containers for dine-in and takeout when properly sanitized per California health codes.
- Food service operators may use a dishwashing machine in addition to the required 3-compartment sink. All automatic ware washers, pan washers, and glass washers in the latest issue of NSF/ANSI Standard 3 are compliant.
- Consumers may bring reusable food and beverage containers to foodservice establishments.[2]

PRACTICAL BENEFITS

- Eliminate monthly supply costs for disposables.
- Reduce waste pickup frequency (See Step 5).
- Enhanced customer experience.
- Consistent supply stocks – No running out.

COST IMPACTS

$ Switch to Reusables Calculator - Calculate your potential savings

Switch to Reusables Calculator - Calculate the time to return on investment

SCAN ME

Read other restaurant's cost savings and success stories HERE.

QUICK-START ACTION PLAN TO MAKE THE CHANGE

Step 1: Assess Your Current Operations

- ☐ Collect three months of service ware ordering data.
- ☐ Evaluate storage capacity and shelving space.
- ☐ Check dishwashing infrastructure – sink size, machine capacity & speed.
- ☐ Calculate daily usage for plates, cups, and utensils during peak service using the Switch to Reusables Calculator on the toolkit homepage (scan any QR code to access tools).

Step 2: Choose Your Highest-Impact Categories

Focus on items with the best cost savings and lowest operational complexity:

- ☐ Start with plates, bowls, cups (high volume/cost).
- ☐ Expand to utensils, ramekins, and specialty items.
- ☐ Consider size, durability, stackability, material, function, and aesthetic.

Step 3: Calculate Quantities & Costs

- ☐ Order 2-3x your peak hourly needs to account for washing cycles.
- ☐ Use the Switch to Reusables Breakeven Cost Calculator on the toolkit homepage (scan any QR code to access tools) to see how many uses are needed to break even.
- ☐ Budget for initial investment.

Step 4: Plan Your Operations

- ☐ Storage: Choose stackable reusable items and store where disposable items used to go.
- ☐ Dishwashing: Plan for dishwashing operations with current staff or hire a dishwasher.
- ☐ Staff training: Discuss changes during a 15-minute training (or during regular staff meetings). Add reminder signs in the kitchen as visual cues.
- ☐ Bus station placement: Place dish return stations slightly away from waste bins to reduce loss. Add clear visuals for customers and staff.

Step 5: Launch and Monitor

- ☐ Start with a single, distinct category like dine-in beverages or a specific meal period where the reusable workflow is most natural for both staff and your operation. After the initial adjustment, consider transitioning other items too.
- ☐ Track savings and staff and customer feedback.
- ☐ Fine tune processes and standard operating procedures after the first two weeks.

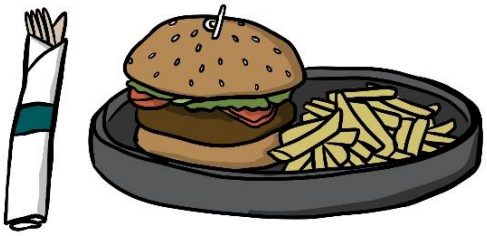
Step 6: Go Above and Beyond

- ☐ Start small with a “bring your own cup or container” program, offering a 10-cent discount.

PRACTICAL TOOLS READY TO USE

Reusable Service Ware Purchasing Guide
Switch to Reusables Calculator

SCAN ME



SEE APPENDIX FOR ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES

TROUBLESHOOTING	
Challenge	**Solution**
Finding space for new reusable inventory	✓ Replace your disposable inventory storage space with vertical shelving or stackable racks. ✓ Use space no longer needed for bulky disposables items. ✓ Choose stackable reusable wares to save space.
Increased dishwashing labor needs	✓ Use the Switch to Reusables Calculator to determine if a full transition to reusables makes financial sense. ✓ Assign staff to handle dishwashing during slow times. ✓ Consider investing in a high-efficiency dishwashing machine to reduce labor.
Making the leap for the initial investment of reusables	✓ Use the Switch to Reusables Calculator to understand potential costs and savings of transitioning to reusables. ✓ Consider payback period length and annual savings. ✓ Plan for the switch if an immediate change isn't feasible.

Option 2. Switch to Compostable Service Ware

TIME ESTIMATION	
Phase	**Time Required**
Ordering	1 hour per month
Initial Setup	2-3 hours
Staff Training	45 minutes
Adjustment Period	1-2 weeks

WHAT'S REQUIRED

- ☐ Businesses are required to source separate materials into the proper recycling, organics, and trash containers per E.M.C. 11.23.040 (B).
- ☐ Disposable service ware made from expanded polystyrene (Styrofoam) is prohibited per E.M.C. 11.27.040.
- ☐ Plastic straws are prohibited per E.M.C. 11.27.060
- ☐ Restaurants are not currently required to switch to compostable service ware, but it can significantly increase organics diversion and help maximize the value of your required organics recycling service, while also simplifying the sorting process to comply with source separation provisions in E.M.C. 11.23.040 (B).

- ☐ Choose fiber-based, non-plastic compostable products. Not all products labeled “compostable” are accepted the green organics bin. Plastic or wax-lined products (even bio-plastics labeled “compostable”) are not compatible with the green bin. If it is waxy or shiny in appearance, it is likely not compostable.
- ☐ Proper disposal training and signage- staff and customers must understand that compostable items go in organics bins, not recycling, to minimize contamination.

COMPLIANCE TIPS

- Bioplastics are NOT accepted in recycling or composting bins - this includes items labeled "compostable plastic," "biodegradable plastic," and "compostable liners." Use paper liners instead of plastic liners.
- Choose fiber-based compostables to maximize organics diversion and prevent rejected loads. Avoid products that are waxy, shiny, or contain bio-based plastic as these contaminate waste streams.
- When in doubt, verify acceptance with your waste hauler or refer to the compostable service ware purchasing guide before purchasing new compostable products to ensure they meet local facility processing standards.

PRACTICAL BENEFITS

Maximize your organics bin investment - get more value from required service

- Simpler - no dishwashing or storage needed.
- Simplified sorting-compostable service ware allows customers to place food waste *and* service ware into one container (the green organics bin).
- Reduce waste pickup frequency (See Step 5).

COST IMPACTS

$ Switch to Compostables Calculator - Calculate the cost of switching

Compliant Compostable Service Ware Purchasing Guide

SCAN ME

QUICK-START ACTION PLAN TO MAKE THE CHANGE

Step 1: Assess Current Disposable Usage

- ☐ Collect one month of disposable ordering data to understand volumes and costs.
- ☐ Identify highest-volume items first: plates, bowls, cups, takeout containers.
- ☐ Calculate current monthly spending on disposables for cost comparison using the Switch to Compostables Calculator.

Step 2: Research Accepted Materials

- ☐ Refer to the provided compliant Compostable Service Ware Purchasing Guide, review EDCO's guide to compostable service ware, or contact them directly to check specific products.
- ☐ Before purchasing anything, ensure that all selected items are fiber based and there are no bioplastics.

Step 3: Source and Test Compostable Wares

- ☐ Use the Compostable Service Ware Purchasing Guide to find compostable options that can be placed in your green organics bin.
- ☐ Order samples to test durability, food safety, and customer acceptance.
- ☐ Compare costs including any price differences and potential waste savings.

Step 4: Plan Operations and Train Staff

- ☐ Ensure organics bins are properly signed and are accessible for compostable service ware disposal.
- ☐ Train staff on proper sorting - compostables go in organics, never recycling.

Step 5: Launch and Monitor

- ☐ Start with one category (like takeout containers) before expanding.
- ☐ Monitor organics bins for contamination. Retrain staff if back-of-house bins are contaminated and increase or improve signage if front-of-house bins are contaminated.
- ☐ Track waste diversion and calculate trash service reduction potential (See Step 5).

TROUBLESHOOTING

Challenge	Solution
Higher costs than non-compostable disposables	✓ Use the Switch to Compostables Calculator to factor in potential waste hauling reductions from increased organics diversion. ✓ Start with high-volume, low-cost items coffee cups before transitioning expensive containers. ✓ Consider the total cost including disposal fees.
Staff and customers putting compostable items in recycling and landfill	✓ Place signage showing compostable service ware goes in green organics bins. ✓ Train staff on the three-bin rule: if it's compostable service ware, it goes in green organics bin only. ✓ Position organics bins prominently near where compostable items are used. Always keep blue, green, and grey bins together.

Product performance issues

- ✓ Test samples during peak service conditions before ordering in bulk.
- ✓ Choose fiber-based products appropriate for your menu - hot foods need heat-resistant materials.
- ✓ Work with suppliers to find alternatives if initial products don't meet operational needs.

STEP 2: IMPROVE RECYCLING

Turn compliance into cost savings - optimized recycling systems reduce waste hauling costs.

TIME ESTIMATION	
Phase	**Time Required**
Research & Planning	2-3 hours
Staff Training	30 minutes

WHAT'S REQUIRED

- ☐ Enroll in commercial recycling service.[3]
- ☐ Set up color-coded and labeled containers in appropriate locations for patrons, employees and residents (e.g., back of house only for full-service restaurants, front and back of house for counter-service restaurants)
- ☐ Sort waste into proper containers. Compliance includes using containers correctly.[4]
- ☐ Train and educate employees on proper waste sorting.[5]

COMPLIANCE TIPS

- View the "What Goes Where" guide to learn how to sort properly.
- Create sorting signage that is relevant to items generated in your restaurant or use the City's Signage Catalog for customizable templates and signage.

PRACTICAL BENEFITS

- Full compliance with recycling ordinances.
- Reduced contamination and compliance fines.
- Waste hauling savings – less material in your trash allows lower service levels and lower bills.
- Improved staff awareness of all waste streams.
- Improved operations with clear sorting procedures.

COST IMPACTS

$ Right Size Your Bins Calculator - Calculate potential savings

SCAN ME

Time to cost savings:
Next waste billing cycle

QUICK-START ACTION PLAN TO MAKE THE CHANGE

Step 1: Audit Your Current System

- ☐ Check EDCO's accepted materials list.[6]
- ☐ Assess bin placement – are your front of house and back of house bins in locations that make sense for customer flow and your kitchen operations?
- ☐ Always place trash, recycling, and organics containers together to reduce contamination.

Step 2: Optimize Bin Setup

- ☐ Right-size your bins – make sure all containers are the right size for your waste production levels. Restaurants that have fully transitioned to compostable or reusable service ware may find they can eliminate front-of-house waste bins entirely, since customers can now place all items in the green organics or blue recycling bins. This reduces space requirements and creates a cleaner, more streamlined dining area.
- ☐ Strategic placement – place waste stations near prep areas where cardboard, cans, and food scraps are generated. In front-of-house areas, place waste stations in visible and clearly marked areas.
- ☐ Clear Signage – ensure all signs match the local requirements, are color coded, and use images of accepted and not accepted items. See EDCO's free printable signs here.
- ☐ Keep potentially problematic items separated (e.g., keep grease containers away from recycling bins).

Step 3: Train Your Team

- ☐ Conduct a 15-minute all-staff meeting to teach the team how to sort correctly.
- ☐ Focus training on top contaminants like food waste, liquids, and soft plastic packaging/film.
- ☐ Keep training simple.
- ☐ Assign responsibility – designate recycling champions for each shift to ensure a clean stream.

Step 4: Monitor and Adjust

- ☐ Conduct daily quick checks to spot contamination in indoor bins and dumpster before pickup. Note what is in the wrong place for future training.
- ☐ Establish weekly reviews with staff about what's working and what's not, reminding staff that poor sorting increases waste costs.
- ☐ Track savings from waste hauling cost reductions (See Step 5)
- ☐ Celebrate wins – acknowledge when your team gets it right and Share Your Story

Watch Where Your Recyclables Go

Watch this video to see what happens after recyclables are picked up from your business.

RECYCLING DO'S & DON'TS

Glass Bottles & Jars
Cardboard & Styrofoam Packaging No packing peanuts
Newspaper
Aluminum and Steel Cans

Plastic bags
Ceramics
Light bulbs
Window glass
Mirrors

Plastic Containers
Mixed Paper
Cartons

Wax paper
Gloves
Food soiled paper

TROUBLESHOOTING

Challenge	Solution
Not enough space in your waste container/ dumpster	✓ Encourage staff to break down cardboard boxes to optimize the space you're paying for and adjust waste hauling service levels (i.e., bin size and/or collection frequency; see Step 5).
Staff compliance	✓ If your team is not complying with the new waste practices, create an incentivized rewards program or competition for "best recycler."
Front of house contamination	✓ Order service ware items that can be recycled or composted. ✓ Train staff on the 5 most common contaminants: 1. Plastic bags & film 2. Food 3. Gloves 4. Dirty plastic containers 5. Food soiled paper & aluminum trays

Grease & Hard to Recycle Materials

Used cooking oil must NEVER be placed in your normal landfill, recycling, or compost containers. Hard to recycle items like grease, bulky plastics, and other items can be delivered to an EDCO Buyback Center free of charge.

STEP 3: REDUCE FOOD WASTE

Save on costs through optimized procurement and preparation habits and consider donating edible food.

TIME ESTIMATION	
Phase	**Time Required**
Initial Setup	2-3 hours
Daily Tracking	5-10 minutes
Weekly Analysis & Pickup Coordination	20 minutes
Staff Training	30 minutes

WHAT'S REQUIRED

- ☐ California's SB1383 requires any restaurant with over 250 seats or 5,000 square feet to set up and track a food donation program. [7]

COMPLIANCE TIPS

Businesses that donate edible food are eligible for IRS charitable donation deductions and they're protected under the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act[8], which:

- Shields restaurants from liability when donating in good faith to nonprofits.
- Covers you as long as food meets safety standards and you follow basic food safety practices.

- Defines prepared foods that weren't served, excess catered items, unopened packaged goods near expiration, day-old baked goods as safe to donate.

If you would serve it to a customer, you can safely donate it!

PRACTICAL BENEFITS

- Immediate cost savings could be visible in 2-4 weeks.
- Reduced overall waste volume and smaller disposal bills.
- Inventory efficiency - buy just what's needed.
- Team becomes cost-conscious.
- More data-driven purchasing.

COST IMPACTS

$ Right Size Your Bins Calculator - Calculate potential savings

SCAN ME

Time to cost savings - Next purchasing cycle

QUICK-START ACTION PLAN TO MAKE THE CHANGE

Step 1: Track Everything for One Week

- ☐ Use simple categories: prep waste, spoilage, plate waste, overproduction.
- ☐ Photograph/weigh and record waste at the end of each shift.
- ☐ Note reasons: expired, overcooked, customer left it, made too much, prep waste, etc.
- ☐ Track by menu item to identify problem dishes.
- ☐ Don't change anything yet – just gather baseline data.

Step 2: Analyze Data & Identify Opportunities

Find Your Top 3 Waste Sources:

- ☐ Prep waste: Trimming, peeling, cutting errors.
- ☐ Overproduction: Making too much of daily specials.
- ☐ Spoilage: "First in, first out" (FIFO) issues, over-ordering perishables.
- ☐ Plate waste: Large portions, unpopular items.

Menu Analysis Questions to Ask Yourself:

- ☐ Which dishes have the highest waste percentages?
- ☐ Are portion sizes too large for price point?
- ☐ Which ingredients spoil most frequently?
- ☐ What prep methods create the most waste?

Step 3: Redesign Menu & Purchasing Strategy

Menu Optimization

- ☐ Reduce portion sizes for high plate-waste items by 10-15%.
- ☐ Remove/modify dishes with consistently high waste.
- ☐ Cross-utilize ingredients across multiple menu items.
- ☐ Add 'kitchen sink' specials to use up excess ingredients.

Purchasing Adjustments

- ☐ Reduce orders for consistently wasted items.
- ☐ Switch to smaller, more frequent deliveries for perishables.
- ☐ Buy pre-prepped items if prep waste is high, which also saves on labor costs.
- ☐ Negotiate with vendors for flexible order quantities and reusable crates and packaging.

Prep Method Changes

- ☐ Batch smaller quantities more frequently.
- ☐ Use trimmings for stocks, soups, and specials.
- ☐ Implement nose-to-tail cooking for proteins.
- ☐ Create daily specials based on excess inventory.

Step 4: Go Above and Beyond - Set Up Food Donation Program

- ☐ Encourage staff to take home leftovers.
- ☐ Utilize food rescue apps. An alternative to food donation is using third-party apps like Too Good To Go to sell leftover prepared food. Many restaurants are able to sell all leftover items!
- ☐ Check with local food donation partners to see if they have the capacity to accept your leftovers.
- ☐ Understand all donation partner requirements about types of food accepted.
- ☐ Designate food donation storage area.
- ☐ Aggregate and schedule weekly pickups.
- ☐ Track weight and number of servings donated with the partner.

PRACTICAL TIPS & TRICKS

Quick Wins

- ☐ Monitor inventory levels and expiration dates.
- ☐ Adjust prep quantities based on sales patterns.
- ☐ Store items properly to extend shelf life.
- ☐ Document waste to identify improvement areas.
- ☐ Log waste reasons to identify training needs.

Enforce "First In, First Out" Procedures

- ☐ "First in, first out" (FIFO), is common knowledge to experienced kitchen staff, but make sure to train new employees.
- ☐ Offer consistent (visual) reminders to your staff.
- ☐ Enforce policy to reduce food and financial waste.

Tweak Your Menu to Be Low Waste

- ☐ Create flexible menus that use overlapping ingredients.
- ☐ Plan dishes that use whole ingredients (stems, leaves, peels).
- ☐ Design portion sizes based on actual demand.
- ☐ Build daily specials around excess inventory.

Creative Ingredient Uses

- ☐ Turn vegetable scraps into stocks and broths.
- ☐ Use overripe produce in sauces, smoothies, or baked goods.
- ☐ Transform day-old bread into croutons, breadcrumbs, or bread pudding.
- ☐ Repurpose herb stems in marinades and infusions.
- ☐ Make pickles from vegetables nearing expiration.

Set Up Food Donation

- ☐ Partner with local food banks or shelters.
- ☐ Establish pickup schedules for surplus food.
- ☐ Train staff on food safety for donations.
- ☐ Track donated items for tax benefits.
- ☐ Create clear labeling system for donated food.

Use Data You Already Have - POS Configuration

- ☐ Set up POS alerts for expiration dates.
- ☐ Use inventory reports to identify slow-moving items for specials.
- ☐ Enable waste tracking features to monitor waste.

TROUBLESHOOTING	
Challenge	**Solution**
Limited staff buy-in	✓ Start with one simple change. ✓ Share early wins and recognize participation.
Inconsistent tracking	✓ Incorporate into existing tasks. ✓ Use visual reminders. ✓ Simplify categories.
Donation logistics	✓ Schedule regular pickups. ✓ Prepare items for pick up during slow periods. ✓ Designate a storage area.
Variable customer demand	✓ Track patterns by day/ weather/events. ✓ Adjust prep quantities. ✓ Utilize your freezer with appropriate items.
Limited storage space	✓ Adjust order frequency. ✓ Prioritize high-waste items.

SEE APPENDIX FOR ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES

STEP 4: GET THE MOST FROM YOUR GREEN ORGANICS BIN

Meet California's organics recycling requirements while optimizing your waste costs - organics recycling is now required for all businesses in California. Maximizing the use of your organics bin helps get the most out of a service you are already paying for and can reduce the volume, service level, and cost of your trash hauling service. [9]

TIME ESTIMATION	
Phase	**Time Required**
Research & Setup	3-4 hours
Staff Training	30 minutes

WHAT'S REQUIRED

- ☐ California SB 1383 and E.M.C. 11.23.040 require all businesses to enroll in organics recycling service.[9]
- ☐ California SB 1383 and E.M.C. 11.23.040 require all businesses to separate organic waste from trash.

COMPLIANCE TIPS

- Bioplastics are not accepted in recycling or composting bins.[10]

- Smart service ware selection: Choose fiber-based compostables labeled 'home compost' to maximize your organics diversion. These items turn your customer waste into compostable material rather than trash.
- Plastic liners, including those labeled “compostable”, are not compatible with the organics bin. Paper liners are a good option for smaller volume bins and can also absorb the moisture in the organics bin contents.
- Cardboard boxes are compostable. These can be layered into your organics bin to absorb moisture from food waste, reducing smell and mess in the bin (this is also a way to reduce the volume of boxes in your recycling bin).

PRACTICAL BENEFITS

- Organic waste diversion compliance.
- Compostable service ware diverts significant volume from trash to organics, maximizing your organics bin investment
- Potential net savings by rebalancing waste management (see Step 5).
    - Less organic waste in the trash may enable less frequent trash pickup and a smaller bin. Organics are typically a significant portion of restaurant waste streams.
- Enhanced food waste awareness – staff see the volume that is wasted firsthand.
- Improved waste sorting across all streams.

Watch Where Your Organics Go

Watch this video to see what happens after organic waste is picked up from your business.

COST IMPACTS

$ Right Size Your Bins Calculator - Calculate potential savings

SCAN ME

Time to cost savings -
Next purchasing/billing cycle

QUICK-START ACTION PLAN TO MAKE THE CHANGE

Step 1: Research Your Options

- ☐ Compare costs for different size containers and frequency of pickups here.
- ☐ Verify accepted materials.
- ☐ Calculate potential savings from downsizing trash service using the Right Size Your Bins calculator (see Step 5).

Step 2: Design Your System

Bin Placement Strategy

- ☐ Kitchen prep areas.
- ☐ Dish pit.
- ☐ Near trash and recycling bins.
- ☐ Easy access for staff.

Container selection and maintenance

- ☐ Size appropriately and empty frequently to prevent odor and keep weight manageable for staff.
- ☐ Use “Slim Jim” containers or 5-gallon buckets depending on volume.
- ☐ Consider purchasing a cart to help move compost buckets to outdoor containers/dumpsters.
- ☐ Use paper liners instead of prohibited compostable liners. (Bonus: This is a cost savings!)

Step 3: Post Clear Signage

- ☐ Compliant signs; or find additional customizable, compliant options on the City’s website

Step 4: Train Your Team

- ☐ Focus on what goes where, why it matters, and daily procedures
- ☐ Designate at least two staff members to champion organics recycling

Step 5: Smart Purchasing Integration

- ☐ Purchase compostable service ware carefully to avoid contamination.
- ☐ Use the Compostable Service Ware Purchasing Guide for Encinitas specific options.

Step 6: Launch & Optimize

- ☐ Start in the kitchen (source of most organic waste).
- ☐ Monitor for the first week and adjust bin sizes and placement if needed.
- ☐ Track contamination and retrain if needed.
- ☐ Adjust trash service once system is implemented.

PRACTICAL TIPS AND TRICKS

- For dine-in, prioritize reusables.
- For take-out, prioritize compostable service ware.
- EDCO's Bilingual Restaurant Guide to Organics Recycling

COMPOSTING DO’S & DON’TS

Raw meat & poultry
Bones
Dairy Products
Fruit & Vegetables
Grains
Coffee
Spoiled Food
Leftovers
Food Soiled Cardboard & Paper
Napkins
Paper towels
Coffee filters
Landscape waste

Bioplastics
Plastic bags (including certified compostable and biodegradable bags)
Cutlery
Gloves
Glass
Wax lined fiber-based products

STRATEGIC SERVICE WARE TRANSITION

Don't forget Step 1 - converting to approved compostable service ware can divert more waste to your organics bin. This single change maximizes your organics service value while potentially reducing trash volume and costs.

TROUBLESHOOTING	
Challenge	**Solution**
Staff keep putting the wrong items in the organics bin	✓ Place organics bins right next to where food waste is generated, making the right choice, the easy choice. ✓ Focus training on the three most common mistakes.
Bin smells and pests	✓ Empty all indoor bins daily, rinse bins weekly, keep all lids closed. ✓ Consider smaller bins that fill up faster, rather than large ones that don't. ✓ Consider increasing the frequency of organics hauling, especially in the hottest months of the year. ✓ Consider layering food waste with cardboard boxes or other paper products that can absorb moisture and mitigate smells (soiled paper products are fully compostable)

SEE APPENDIX FOR ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES

STEP 5: RIGHT-SIZE YOUR COLLECTION SERVICE

Check for opportunities to save on your monthly waste hauling bill and ensure your service levels are appropriate to the organics, recyclables, and residual waste that your business is generating.

TIME ESTIMATION	
Phase	**Time Required**
Initial Monitoring	5 minutes per day for one week
Contract Review	30 minutes
Calculations	15-20 minutes
Ongoing Monitoring	20 minutes monthly

WHAT'S REQUIRED

- ☐ E.M.C. 11.23.040 requires businesses to enroll in three-stream collection services, at a level that ensures that source-separated organics and recyclables are not disposed of as waste (and vice-versa).

PRACTICAL BENEFITS

You may see the following benefits by taking action. Individual results may vary.

- Immediate cost savings may be visible on your next bill.

- Pay only for the waste volume you need.
- Compliance - proper capacity prevents violations.
- Space optimization - smaller bins mean more room in your enclosure or outdoor bin area.
- Reduced contamination - proper bin capacity improves sorting.

COST IMPACTS

$ Right Size Your Bins Calculator - Calculate potential savings

SCAN ME

Time to cost savings -
Next waste billing cycle

QUICK-START ACTION PLAN TO MAKE THE CHANGE

Step 1: Monitor Current Fill Levels

- ☐ Take photos of each bin before pick up.
- ☐ Estimate fill levels (25%, 50%, 75%, 100%, overflowing).
- ☐ Note which bins are under or over-filled.
- ☐ Track by waste stream (i.e., recycling, trash, compost).
- ☐ Note peak vs. slow days.

Step 2: Analyze Your Data - Look for Patterns

- ☐ If your trash bins are at 50% - downsize bins or reduce frequency.
- ☐ If your recycling is overflowing - order larger bins or more frequent pick up.
- ☐ If you experience high variability – don't oversize your bins, check about flexible service options first.

Step 3: Calculate Optimal Service Levels

- ☐ Use the Right Size Your Bins Calculator to see how your service levels and costs may shift due to changes to your waste management system.

Step 4: Review Your Contract & Request Service Adjustments

- ☐ Present your data to your hauling partner – photos, fill level documentation, and calculator results.
- ☐ Request specific changes based on calculations and/or work with your hauling partner to confirm options and alternatives.

☐ Negotiate timing – immediate vs. contract renewal.

TROUBLESHOOTING	
Challenge	**Solution**
Unpredictable volume fluctuations	✓ Explore buffer capacity. ✓ Leverage on-call service options (additional hauler pickups) as needed.
Limited space for multiple bins	✓ Schedule staggered pickups. ✓ Use space-efficient bin placement. ✓ Inquire with neighbors about sharing an account.
Overflow during peak periods	✓ Temporary service increases. ✓ Increase staff awareness of critical periods.
Waste variations between locations	✓ Site-specific assessments, standardized monitoring, location-appropriate sizing.

STEP 6: SHARE YOUR STORY

Sharing your wins builds trust, avoids greenwashing, and strengthens your brand. Build a communications plan that uses your sustainability efforts to build connection with your customers.

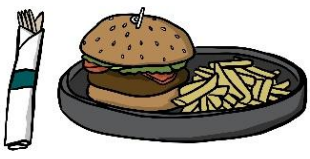
SHARE YOUR STORY AUTHENTICALLY

Authentic communication (like showing real numbers, celebrating staff, acknowledging challenges, and involving customers) creates transparency and credibility. Here are some effective ways to communicate your sustainability story across different channels:

In-house signage and table tents

"Getting full? Ask for a to-go box to keep your meal out of the trash."

"We reduced ____ pounds of waste last year, help us make it _____ this year by recycling right"



Menu descriptions

"We reduced ____ pounds of waste last year by switching to reusable plates, cups, and silverware."

"At our restaurant food is too good to waste! We donate unsold food and compost all kitchen and table scraps."

"Our staff and customers are zero waste heroes – always making sure to recycle right."

"Avoiding waste is good for our business, community, and customers!"

Website content

"At our restaurant, waste is on the way out! To reduce our impact, we:

- Help our staff and customers recycle right, diverting _____ pounds from the landfill.
- Donate over $_____ worth of unsold food to feed our community
- Switched to reusable dishes, cups, and silverware to keep plastic out of the ocean.
- Compost all our kitchen and table scraps to regenerate soil.

We aren't zero waste yet and are continuing to look for ways to further reduce our impact!"

Social media post

"May 29th is National Learn About Composting Day. We compost all our kitchen scraps to help build healthy soils in our region!"

"September 29th is Food Waste Awareness Day. We help feed our community and avoid waste by donating unsold food!"

"We've ditched single use plastics, and our customers love it! Come check it out for yourself and have a (insert special or customer menu favorite) served with style!"

"May 25th is international No Plastics Day! We landfill 50% less single use plastics and other trash since switching to reusable plates, cups, and silverware."

Staff talking points

"It's great that you noticed our partnership with (insert donation partner). We work with (insert donation partner) to pick up and redistribute unsold food to help feed our community."

"If your meal comes with anything you aren't interested in, let me know and I'll take it off the order, so it's not wasted. I can also wrap it up to go if you'd rather enjoy it later."

"Getting full? I'm happy to get you a box so you can keep enjoying your meal later."

"I'm glad you saw our new zero waste signage, don't hesitate to ask me about the changes and how they help keep plastic out of the ocean."

"We aren't zero waste yet, but our owners and staff feel really proud to have reduced our waste so much already."

Media tip – Waste stories get readership

Consider reaching out to your local news outlets or running advertorials about your waste efforts. Waste reduction stories are a great way to engage with your customer base and community. Waste stories are especially popular around "focus" days (e.g., International No Plastics Day, etc.)

UNDERSTANDING COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS

Commercial businesses are subject to mandatory minimum recycling requirements under state law and local ordinance. To meet the minimum compliance threshold, restaurants are required to:

- Enroll in trash, recycling, and organics collection services
- Provide adequate access to blue bin recycling and green bin organics recycling for customers and/or employees (e.g., front and back of house bins for counter-service restaurants, back of house bins for full-service restaurants)
- Provide adequate color-coded signage for all trash, recycling, and organics containers that inform proper waste sorting ("what goes where")
- Provide employee training to minimize contamination in trash, recycling, and organics bins and dumpsters

In addition to minimum recycling requirements, local ordinance contains the following provisions to limit plastic waste and pollution:

- Plastic utensils must be available upon request of the customer or upon offer by the food provider. This requirement includes take-out and drive-thru orders.
- Plastic straws are prohibited.
- Styrofoam food containers are prohibited.

LOCAL RESOURCES

The following local resources represent known suppliers, partners, and other support at the time of publishing. The list is not intended to be exhaustive and may change over time.

Food Service Suppliers

Food Service Supplier	Location
Sysco – Food Distributor & Restaurant Supplies	12180 Kirkham Rd Poway, CA 92064
Chef City Restaurant Equipment & Supplies	9150 Clairemont Mesa Blvd, San Diego, CA 92123
Chef's Toys Restaurant Supply & Equipment	6310 Miramar Rd, San Diego, CA 92121
Restaurant Depot	7466 Carroll Rd, San Diego, CA 92121
San Diego Restaurant Supply	1202 Market St, San Diego, CA 92101

* This list represents a sample of available suppliers and is not exhaustive. Additional providers may be available in your area.

Food Donation and Rescue Partners

- Feeding San Diego & MealConnect
- Too Good To Go App
- Careit
- Copia
- Food Donation Connection

Waste Advising and Technical Support

- City of Encinitas. Contact recycling@encinitasca.gov
- EDCO offers free on-site technical visits to support bin rightsizing. Just fill out their contact form here.

REFERENCES

1. San Diego County Food Facility Plan Review Guide.
2. California Law AB619

3. California AB 341
4. California AB 341
5. Train Employees to Recycle Right
6. EDCO Recycling Guide
7. Food Recovery in California
8. Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act
9. Statewide Mandatory Organic Waste Collection
10. City of Encinitas Mandatory Organics Recycling And Edible Food Donation

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