



WASTE DIVERSION AT JAVITS CENTER



Javits Center Sustainability Team
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INTRODUCTION

As the busiest convention center in the United States, the Jacob K Javits Center in New York City is proud to serve as a model of sustainability for venues around the world. Our sustainability journey began with the 2009-2014 renovations of our South Building. In 2021, we completed our expansion project, introducing a new array of high-tech waste compactors and two underground cisterns for treating and recirculating rainwater, all nestled underneath a 1-acre rooftop farm, greenhouse, and food forest. The Javits Center's decade-long focus on green infrastructure has been fruitful (quite literally: we are now producing 50+ crops per year on our rooftop that are integrated directly into event meals). However, since the pandemic, our focus has shifted more acutely to embedding sustainability into event logistics.

Waste diversion has become a central focus for the event production teams, and the Javits Center aims to position itself as the ideal venue for hosting zero-waste events in the near future. While we still have much room for improvement, we have made great strides since 2021 thanks to increased demand from event organizers for waste management solutions and enhanced collaboration with our waste vendors. We continue to learn from venues across the nation through coalitions and working groups, we are a proud signatory of the Net Zero Carbon Events (NZCE) Pledge, and we abide by the policies set forth by the New York State's GreenNY Council as a state entity. Multiple pilot projects conducted throughout 2023 have allowed us to identify our standard best practices, improve our infrastructure, flow of operations, and standardize our communications strategy with event organizers.

The Javits Center's waste diversion rate has climbed from **26% in 2022 to 45% in 2023**, and we forecast greater improvements in 2024 and 2025. In our submission to the 2024 UFI Sustainable Development Award, we aim to demonstrate how we synthesized the many moving elements of our waste diversion program into one cohesive strategy over the course of 2023. We will describe the improvements that we have made as an organization in 2023 to divert thousands of tons of waste from landfills, and we will illustrate our progress using data pulled from extensive monthly waste data analysis. While the events industry makes strides towards centering *reduction* and *reuse* efforts, we hope to serve as an example to venues around the world who are searching for meaningful *recycling* solutions in the meantime. Thank you for your consideration.

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

In-house Cleaning Teams, Third-party Cleaning Teams, Culinary Stewarding Teams, General Contractors, Event Organizers/Show Managers, Exhibitors, Event Sustainability Consultants, Waste Haulers/Brokers, Waste Processing Facilities, Donation Haulers, Donation Partners, Upcycling Partners, Javits Event Solutions Managers, Javits Exhibitor Solutions Department, Javits Sustainability Team

ACTIONS TAKEN

Consistent Standard Operating Procedures

In 2023, our team focused on solidifying and standardizing all waste management procedures that occur at the Javits Center so that all teams are on the same page. Our cleaning teams separate eight main waste streams from the landfill, and we have official SOP documents for each stream:

1. Mixed recycling (metal, glass, plastic, paper)
2. Cardboard
3. Soft plastics
4. Donations
5. Organic waste
6. Construction + demolition waste
7. Kitchen grease
8. e-waste

Employee Engagement and Education

SOP documents are meaningless if their contents are not communicated via frequent, clear, and consistent training. Our two-pronged training strategy includes 1) printed training infographics, and 2) quarterly training sessions with the Sustainability Team.

The Javits Center can have up to four cleaning teams in the building at one time, each with their own contracts and set of responsibilities. Furthermore, these cleaning teams will staff up for large shows, meaning that temporary staff often deal with event waste. It was important for us to generate clear training material that can be provided to employees by team supervisors at the start of each shift. Our materials are image-focused to appeal to visual learners and to avoid confusion for employees who do not speak English.

Event Communications

In 2023 we build a comprehensive event communications strategy, and we are proud to say that the number of events that we are in touch with for pre-event planning in 2024 has increased almost four-fold compared to 2023 (2023 = communicated with 5 shows; 2024 = communicated/communicating with 19 shows so far).

Our brand-new strategy can be divided into 3 phases: pre-event, show-open, and post-event.

1. Pre-Event Communications
 - a. Pre-Event Survey: As soon as one of our Event Solutions Managers engages with an event organizer, they send the link to our Pre-Event Sustainability Survey. This survey collects data on the materials that the show expects their own team and their event exhibitors to bring into the building. The Sustainability Team is notified when an event organizer fills out the survey.
 - b. Waste Deck: Not all event organizers fill out the survey. But if they do, our team will send over the Javits Center's "Waste Deck," outlining our standard waste management procedures and all additional services that can be requested.

station staffing or back-of-house sorting at the compactors. To meet the demand for these services, the Javits Center has developed the infrastructure and employee training materials needed to activate these services upon request. These special services are offered to shows as options in our “Waste Deck,” which we send to shows in the pre-event planning phase.

RESULTS

Operational

Increased efficiency in cardboard recycling due to second baler installation. The first baler was installed in the new expansion building where we baled approximately 40 bales in 2022, while we baled more than 200 bales from May 2023 to December 2023.

Engagement

Increased internal stakeholder and external stakeholder engagement. Internal stakeholder engagements helped in better efficiency from consistent training of various cleaning teams. It also included regular dock walks and the show floor walks by the sustainability team. External stakeholder engagement helped in understanding our streams better, as we started engaging with third party vendors, who process our waste streams.

Reporting

Data collection for reports improved because of engagement with our internal and external stakeholders. More shows requested waste data to include in their reports.

Infrastructure.

Reusable wax coated cardboard bin wraps helped in increasing our recycling of bottles and cans.

LESSONS LEARNED

Operational

The location of the second baler on the docks of our main building made it easier for the cleaning teams to coordinate collection and flow of the clean cardboard to the baler.

Engagement

It was very important for us to identify the correct teams to be trained for their specific areas of responsibility. Our engagement with the vendors of waste hauler helped us in understanding our streams better, which helped us in simplifying our streams and creating communication (such as signage) around it. Our early engagement with the events helped us in improving the backend processes and training for all parties involved. It also increased collaboration between all parties.

Reporting

Data analysis is extremely helpful; we questioned all data points from different waste streams at Javits. Worked closely with the waste hauler and worked with their vendors to increase transparency of the process to help improve the data collection.

Infrastructure

Simplifying the mixed recycling stream and making it specific only for bottles and cans helped in increasing recycling of our attendee waste. The visuals of the bin wraps played a critical role in it as we focused on the colors, graphic icons, language and the restricted opening of the recycling bin wrap for bottles and cans only.

NEXT STEPS

Recycling of Construction and Demolition (C&D) Material

We plan to research our current recycling of C&D material to confirm that all the materials in the stream from our open tops are recycled properly. We also want to identify if simplifying the C&D stream into separate material specific streams (such as metal, wood) would be more efficient to increase our waste diversion rate.

Third Party Waste Audit

We plan to conduct a third-party waste audit in 2024 with a focus on our current landfill stream. This will help us understand what materials are going into our landfill stream and develop the strategy to divert those materials either into our existing waste streams or identify streams that we currently don't have for reducing our landfill loads.

Bin infrastructure

The reusable wax coated bin wraps have been a success for our show floor, as they provide ease of movement based on the floor plans of various shows, however for our public areas, we need permanent bins (not cardboard bin wraps) which with similar visuals to have a consistent product offering.

Event engagement

We have started sharing our pre-event survey with all the events now and will continue having conversations with the events in the planning stages to increase waste diversion from Javits Center.

Carpet

We are currently working on finding solutions for woven carpets, which is challenging. We will continue exploring options for them and will also research the non-woven carpet (Alma) recycling results.