

ECO-FRIENDLY WASTE MANAGEMENT

A practical guide on how humanitarian and development organisations can **reduce the amount of waste** they produce and **manage unavoidable waste safely**



This practical guide was designed for humanitarian and development organisations who want to reduce the environmental impact of their operations, such as running their offices, and managing logistics and procurement. It focuses on **reducing waste** and **safely managing unavoidable waste**. Reducing waste saves natural resources. It also lowers pollution and greenhouse gases that come from making, disposing of, and decomposing materials. By ensuring that waste is managed effectively, organisations can give it another life (e.g. by recycling) or dispose of it in a way that reduces environmental damage and prevents health risks. Many waste-reduction measures also reduce organisational costs.

This document will **help you understand**:

- Which waste-related measures are most effective?
- How much time and money do they require?
- How can you implement them?
- What should you be careful about?

The guidance encourages organisations to choose the measures that are most realistic and effective in their context. It is part of a larger **package of resources designed to help organisations operate in a more eco-friendly manner**. Other resources in this package include a step-by-step guide on how to introduce various environmental measures in your organisation, an easy-to-use planning and reporting tool, practical checklists and guidance on additional topics, such as ensuring more eco-friendly transport, using energy more efficiently, saving water, making procurement more sustainable, and organising events in an eco-friendly manner. You can access these additional resources through [this website](#).

The guide is offered through the [Civil Society Now](#) platform that supports civil society organisations in developing their capacities. It was prepared in 2024 by [People in Need](#) as part of its efforts to **increase the environmental sustainability of humanitarian and development operations**. If you have any questions or suggestions on how to improve the guidance, please contact petr.schmied@peopleinneed.net.



WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT ECO-FRIENDLY WASTE MANAGEMENT?

If you want to ensure more eco-friendly waste management, follow the **3Rs principle**: reduce, reuse, recycle:

- **Reduce**: Cutting down the amount of waste your organisation creates should be your key priority, as it is far more effective than any other action. You can achieve reductions by reviewing how much and what kind of waste your organisation generates and deciding which waste could be prevented. There are dozens of measures you can take, such as avoiding purchasing single-use plastic items, purchasing goods that involve less packaging, rethinking the amount of printed materials you need, and using rechargeable batteries).
- **Reuse**: Prioritising reusing items to give them a longer life. For example, repairing older furniture or IT equipment, investing in rechargeable batteries, and using refillable ink cartridges for printers. Some items can also be repurposed, for example, using wooden pallets to make furniture, such as desks or shelves. Similarly, old tyres can be turned into garden planters. Other items can be donated, such as equipment you no longer need which is still functional.
- **Recycle**: When items cannot be reduced or reused, recycling is the next best option. However, the availability of recycling facilities is limited in many countries. Therefore, it is crucial to find out which types of waste are collected locally for recycling. For the remaining types of waste, your priority should be on reducing the amount of such waste and disposing of unavoidable waste in a way that minimises any harm to the environment.

The '3Rs' have the following priorities:



Recycling and disposal are the last resort, minimizing waste is the top priority.

KEY TERMS TO UNDERSTAND

- **Climate change** refers to long-term shifts in Earth's weather patterns caused by human activities and natural processes. Effects include rising temperatures and altered precipitation.
- **Greenhouse gas emissions** refer to the release of greenhouse gases (e.g. carbon dioxide and methane) into Earth's atmosphere that trap heat, warm our planet and lead to climate change.



HOW CAN YOU ENSURE MORE ECO-FRIENDLY WASTE MANAGEMENT?

There are dozens of measures your organisation can take to reduce the waste it produces and to manage unavoidable waste in a more eco-friendly manner. This guide helps you **focus on several most feasible and impactful measures**:

Priority #1: Reduce waste

- \$ ⌚ Introduce and enforce a ban on using single-use plastic or paper plates, cutlery, cups, and similar single-use items on your premises and other venues where alternatives can be arranged
- \$ ⌚ Introduce and enforce a ban on purchasing plastic bottles (for the office and events) and replace them with water dispensers or water filters
- ⌚ Discuss and agree with your colleagues on clear rules for eco-friendly printing
- ⌚ Specify in purchase requirements how goods should be packaged to minimise the amount of packaging-related waste and to use more eco-friendly packaging while protecting the goods

Priority #2: Reuse items

- \$ ⌚ Use reusable items more extensively
- \$ ⌚ Extend the lifetime of equipment by providing training, protective cases, regular service, and repairs. Do not replace equipment if it is functional or repairable

Priority #3: Ensure recycling and safe disposal of waste

- ⌚⌚ Assess your local waste disposal options – who collects which types of waste and uses it responsibly
- \$ ⌚ Segregate those types of waste which are locally collected and then reused or recycled effectively
- ⌚ Introduce and enforce clear rules for the safe disposal of hazardous waste
- ⌚ Prominently display posters summarising the main waste-related rules and practices you agreed on

Your colleagues are likely to have good ideas about how to effectively implement the recommended measures and may also suggest other measures. **Involve them in the discussion of the planned waste management measures** so that they are actively engaged in their development and support their implementation.

TIME ⌚ AND MONEY \$

For each recommended measure, the symbols of money (\$) and time (⌚) indicate how demanding it is to implement the measure. The more symbols of \$ / ⌚ there are, the more initial funding / time investment is required. If the \$ symbol is not shown, it means that the measure does not cost (almost) anything to implement.

PRIORITY #1: REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF WASTE

Humans produce more than 2 billion tonnes of waste annually; this is equivalent to approximately 10,000 football stadiums filled with waste. At the same time, humanitarian and development organisations often operate in environments with underdeveloped waste management systems. Frequently there are little or no facilities for recycling waste and for managing general waste in a way that does not harm the environment. Therefore, the priority for your waste management efforts should be to reduce the amount of waste you generate - this is the most impactful measure you can take.

\$ 🕒 **Introduce and enforce a ban on using single-use plastic or paper plates, cutlery, cups, and similar single-use items on your premises and other venues where alternatives can be arranged**

Why: Single-use items are a massive burden for the environment. Their production requires oil, paper, chemical additives, and other resources. In many countries, most are not (or cannot be) recycled and often pollute the environment, harm nature, and pose risks to health.

How: It is recommended that you introduce a ban on the use of single-use plastic or paper plates, cutlery, cups, food boxes, and similar single-use items applies to items that 1) would be paid for by your organisation; and 2) would be used at its premises and venues where alternatives can be arranged, such as meeting and training venues. This means that even if a hotel / restaurant / caterer / venue provider arranges food or drinks paid for by your organisation, your staff would be responsible for verifying and requesting that they provide them using reusable cups, plates, etc.

The rule should say that only reusable plates, cups, cutlery, food boxes, and similar items can be used. The only exception is occasions when it would be challenging to ensure reusable alternatives – e.g. where they are unavailable (or it would be complicated to arrange them), where they cannot be washed, etc.

Be careful about how you communicate and how you implement this measure: your colleagues must understand why you introduce such a measure – discuss it with them at relevant meetings. It is also essential that they always have suitable alternatives to single-use cups, plates, etc. Verify their availability at your organisation's premises and, if needed, purchase more.

Regarding the food and beverages paid for by your colleagues and used in the office: It is recommended to use positive encouragements that motivate them to use reusable items, such as lunch boxes voluntarily.

Say NO to single-use items



PRIORITY #1: REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF WASTE

\$ 🕒 **Introduce and enforce a ban on purchasing plastic bottles (for the office and events) and replace them with water dispensers or water filters**

Why: Most plastic bottles are not recycled and end up in landfills, polluting the natural environment and the places where people live. The degradation of plastic water bottles leads to the release of harmful chemicals. Humanitarian and development organisations should not contribute to this harm and are encouraged to ban purchasing plastic bottles for their offices and events, where possible.

How: The ban on the purchase of plastic bottles applies to your organisation's offices and any events where water (or other drinks) can be provided using alternatives. These include using different types of water dispensers (see photos) and using water filters. The ban also applies to hotels and similar venues where alternatives can be provided.

Be careful about communicating and implementing this measure: Discuss with your colleagues why is such a measure introduced and what alternatives they can use. Suitable alternatives to plastic bottles must always be present. People should always be able to fill clean cups or bottles with safe water in all offices and at all events. Encourage people to refill their water bottles before they go on field trips. During events (e.g. training), ensure that a water dispenser and cups are available instead of giving everyone a plastic bottle.

The ban does not apply to instances where you provide water to affected populations (e.g. during a humanitarian response). At the same time, as a part of environmental mainstreaming, project teams are responsible for finding ways to use more eco-friendly solutions.



PRIORITY #1: REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF WASTE

🕒 Discuss and agree with your colleagues on clear rules for eco-friendly printing

Why: We sometimes need to print documents. However, since printing generates waste and consumes energy, paper, toner, and other resources, we must always consider the necessity of printing a document. And if we must print it, we do it in a way that uses fewer resources.

How: Use any relevant meeting to discuss with your colleagues why your organisation wants to decrease the environmental impact of printing and agree on what eco-friendly printing practices you will follow. These might include, for example:

- digitising documentation when possible (e.g. leave requests, timesheets)
- printing only what must be printed (what cannot be shared by email or QR code)
- printing on both sides of the page (if possible, set this as the default option in your printer)
- printing in black and white only, unless it is necessary to use colours
- some printers allow you to print in an “economy” mode, using less ink – if there is such an option, use it
- when printing slides, use the “handouts” mode
- purchase and use recycled paper of good quality (so that it doesn’t jam the printer)

While it is relatively easy to agree on such rules, ensuring that people (remember to) follow them is more demanding. Agree on what you will do to ensure that all the staff practice the rules. These might include:

- explaining and discussing the agreed practices during meetings and by email (repeating if necessary)
- prominently displaying posters next to printers that communicate the required printing behaviour in your office – see example on the right

Often, the most effective approach is to set eco-friendly practices in the printer by default so that it automatically prints double sides in black and white, using grayscale / economy mode, etc.

In addition, pay attention not only to what you print in your offices but also to what is printed externally, such as leaflets, brochures and banners. Your priorities should be: 1) avoid printing if possible (e.g. by sharing materials electronically or via QR codes); 2) if you must print, consider printing in smaller quantities; and 3) ensure that you print in an eco-friendly manner (e.g. on recycled paper).

We follow these eco-printing practices

- Print in black and white when possible. Utilize the HP LaserJet for black-only printing. Reserve the Xerox 2020 for necessary color prints.
- Print double-sided to reduce paper usage.
- Use digital formats and electronic signatures to limit printing.
- Preview documents before printing to ensure accuracy and avoid unnecessary reprints.
- Adjust page layouts and fonts to minimize paper wastage.
- Reuse one-sided printed sheets for internal documents or note-taking.
- Use eco-friendly paper.

PRIORITY #1: REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF WASTE

🕒 **Specify in purchase requirements how goods should be packaged to minimise the amount of packaging-related waste and to use more eco-friendly packaging while protecting the goods**

Why: Many organisations work in contexts where waste is poorly managed. This leads to soil and water pollution that is harmful to the environment and people's health. Working with the suppliers on 1) finding ways to use less packaging and 2) using more eco-friendly packaging materials can reduce such negative impacts of the aid provided. It can also reduce the energy and resources required to produce packaging.

How: This measure is relevant, especially for organisations that procure and distribute large volumes of goods, because such distributions often generate vast quantities of packaging waste. If this is your case, it is recommended that you include in the purchase requirements precise specifications of how the purchased goods should (not) be packaged. It is recommended to consult donors' requirements (if any) and to discuss your packaging requirements with the potential suppliers to ensure they understand them and are able to meet them. The requirements can include, for example:

- goods must be protected against damage
- goods must be supplied in bulk packaging
- no individual wrapping of purchased items
- transport packaging must be made of recyclable/reusable materials (e.g. pallets)
- packaging must take as little space as possible to maximise transport and storage efficiency
- packaging must not be oversized (e.g. using large boxes for smaller items or too thick wrapping)
- packaging can be reused for other purpose by the recipient
- packaging contains the highest proportion of biodegradable / recycled materials
- packaging should not contain polyvinyl chloride (PVC) – the most environmentally damaging plastic

It is recommended to focus primarily on procurements at risk of generating the most waste and procurements for which packaging can be easily reduced.

PRIORITY #2: REUSE ITEMS

An additional priority in waste management is to prolong the lifespan of your equipment, ensuring it continues to serve you for an extended period and avoids becoming waste.

\$ 🕒 Use reusable items more extensively

Why: Using reusable items has multiple benefits: it saves money, requires fewer natural resources, and generates considerably less waste.

How: Discuss with colleagues which types of reusable items your organisation could reuse instead of using single-use items. Examples include using:

- rechargeable batteries
- refillable printer cartridges
- packaging materials (envelopes, boxes)
- reusable utensils
- reusable visibility banners (or, instead of printing banners, screening them using LCD projectors)
- reusable name tags for events

Consider making a formal rule saying which reusable items will be used instead of single-use items.

PRIORITY #2: REUSE ITEMS

\$ 🕒 **Extend the lifetime of equipment by providing training, protective cases, regular service, and repairs. Do not replace equipment if it is functional or repairable**

Why: The longer equipment lasts, the less your organisation needs to buy. This reduces operating expenses and the natural resources needed to produce new equipment - it is a win-win for both your organisation and the environment.

How: Discuss with colleagues what measures would help the most with ensuring that the most common work equipment, such as laptops, smartphones, tablets, printers, furniture, etc. lasts longer. This might include, for example:

- regular training on how to operate and care for the equipment they use (e.g. laptops, printers) so that it lasts longer (and uses less energy)
- using phone screen protectors
- providing protective cases for laptops and requiring their use outside the office
- agreeing with IT colleagues on regular checks of laptops and software updates
- whenever possible, prioritising repairs of equipment instead of automatically buying new one

Ensure that your colleagues who are responsible for purchases understand that before replacing equipment, they must verify whether the equipment can be repaired and, if so, arrange the repair. At the same time, communicate to all staff that they must prioritise repairing equipment whenever possible instead of purchasing new ones.

Consider also giving equipment new life by repurposing - for example, using wooden pallets to make furniture, such as desks or shelves. Similarly, old tyres can be turned into garden planters. Engage your colleagues in finding additional solutions.

PRIORITY #3: ENSURE RECYCLING AND SAFE DISPOSAL

The last set of measures concerns the unavoidable waste your organisation generates. Here, you have two options: Understand which waste is collected for recycling locally and then ensure that your offices segregate such waste and provide it for recycling. The remaining waste must be disposed of in a way that reduces the risk of damage to the environment. This dual approach ensures responsible waste handling and reinforces your organisation's commitment to environmental protection.

🕒 Assess your local waste disposal options – who collects which types of waste and uses it responsibly

Why: To decide how to dispose of waste in an ecologically friendly manner, you first must understand your options.

How: Consult available online resources (such as [WREC's map of waste management facilities](#)), your colleagues, local environmental organisations, authorities, or relevant companies to understand who collects which types of waste and how the waste is used. Remember to identify options for the safe disposal of hazardous waste, such as batteries, electronics, car tyres, etc. This can then inform your decision on how to dispose of different types of waste.

💰 🕒 Segregate the types of waste which are locally collected and then reused or recycled effectively

Why: If your organisation segregates its waste that is later recycled or reused, you give this waste a new life, reduce pollution, decrease the risk of health issues, and effect a more sustainable use of natural resources.

How: Use the findings of your assessment of safe disposal options to introduce clear rules for the segregation and disposal of waste. Always consider what does (not) make sense. For example:

- If someone regularly collects and effectively uses a specific type of waste locally, then it is worth segregating it.
- There might be a facility that recycles paper but it is relatively far and bringing the paper by car might do more environmental harm than good.
- Similarly, there is no point in, for example, segregating plastic if no facilities exist locally to recycle it.
- The same applies to organic waste – composting waste is great. However, someone needs to take care of the compost regularly, and it makes sense only if the compost is used.



PRIORITY #3: ENSURE RECYCLING AND SAFE DISPOSAL

In summary, introduce feasible practices that do not cause more harm than good. Ensure that designated waste bins are available and clearly labelled. Display posters by the bins showing where the main types of waste can go. And most importantly discuss with all the staff why and how to segregate waste. Do it regularly, using meetings and positive visual reminders. The exact choice of which type of waste can go into which bins depends on the company that collects / recycles the waste, so ask them about their requirements.

Important: Ensure that the people who dispose of the office waste (most likely cleaners) understand where and why they should put the different waste types. Supervise that this is done. Proper supervision will prevent the carefully segregated waste from ending up in the wrong containers.

Introduce and enforce clear rules for the safe disposal of hazardous waste

Why: Hazardous waste, such as batteries, toners, electronic equipment, car tyres, oil from generators and vehicles, oil filters, and medical waste cause the most serious damage to the natural environment. If not disposed of safely, they can contaminate water and soil and pose significant health risks.

How: Use the findings of your [assessment of safe disposal options](#) to introduce clear rules for the disposal of hazardous waste - particularly those mentioned above. Your rules might require:

- Ensuring that relevant waste bins / collection places are available.
- Assigning clear responsibilities for who is supposed to manage the waste, how, etc.
- Communicating the rules for disposing of hazardous waste to the staff. This must be done repeatedly. Use meetings, posters, stickers on bins, etc.

Since garages usually handle car-related waste, you must assess how the garage(s) you use dispose of this waste. If it is not done safely, you should agree with them on changes or use another garage - if possible. [ICRC's guidance](#) is helpful here; each type of waste is given a 'traffic light' that says which waste disposal options are (not) acceptable.

A particular category of hazardous waste is unused or expired medications (e.g. from first aid kits). These should be disposed of according to the recommendations of the local Ministry of Health



Source: UCB

PRIORITY #3: ENSURE RECYCLING AND SAFE DISPOSAL

🕒 Prominently display posters summarising the main waste-related rules and practices you agreed on

Why: People sometimes forget (how) to dispose of waste in an eco-friendly way, so a friendly reminder of the main waste-related rules can help them follow the agreed-upon steps.

How: Collaborating with a communications colleague, design a positive-looking poster summarising how your office handles different types of waste. See several examples below. Avoid including too many details and use an upbeat communication style. The primary purpose is to communicate what your office considers a 'normal behaviour' when handling waste. E.g. *"In our office, we ..."*. Display the posters near the bins and other visible places. Ensure that they are written in the language(s) people understand.



YOUR CHECKLIST FOR SAVING WATER

[On this website](#) you can find a practical checklist helping you quickly assess the extent to which your organisation already uses the promoted waste management measures. You can also include in the checklist any other measures that you or your colleagues proposed. The results will help you **decide which measures should you focus on.**

Measure	To what extent is it implemented?			
	Fully	Partially	Not implemented	Not possible to implement
Have you discussed with your colleagues what your organisation will do to produce less waste and manage it in a more eco-friendly way?				
Do you have an effective ban on using single-use items such as plates and cups?				
Do you have an effectively working ban on purchasing plastic bottles in place?				
Does your organisation offer alternatives to using single-use items and plastic bottles?				
Does your organisation specify in tenders how the goods should be packaged to minimise the amount of packaging-related waste and to use eco-friendly packaging?				
Does your organisation extend the lifetime of equipment by providing protective cases, regular service and repairs?				
Does the staff of your organisation avoid purchasing new equipment if existing equipment is functional or can be repaired?				
Does your organisation use reusable items extensively instead of single-use items?				

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