



Eliminating Single-Use Plastics from a Conference (Moving Towards Zero Waste)

What we did:

- Chose a like-minded event organiser who was willing to help source plastic-free solutions
- Advertising was done electronically, and we used cork coasters and small cardboard flyers at other conferences
- Stiff cardboard name badges with no plastic pockets
- Bamboo lanyards with metal clips (for name badges)
- 100% jute/cotton conference bags (can be repurposed as a shopping bag)
- No printed envelopes for registration packs
- Option to pre-purchase a KeepCup with an AMSA logo
- Espresso coffee carts with returnable Go2Cups (washed and returned fresh each day). Great coffee and a big winner with delegates (<http://go2cup.com.au>)
- Provided water jugs with glassware (or to refill personal water bottles)
- No packaged mints or lollies, plastic pens
- Provided sustainably sourced pencils and sharpening stations
- No printed abstracts (All abstracts were available online to delegates)
- Printed pocket program for daily use
- All required printing was done by The Big Picture Factory who use a solar powered printer and purchase sustainably sourced paper
- Delegates were provided with plates/silverware/glassware at meal times
- Vegetarian morning and afternoon tea catering breaks, whole fruit on some days
- All exhibitors, workshop organisers and additional functions, such as the student night and public lecture, were committed to reducing plastic waste for 'free give-way' products and catering
- Delegates were asked to bring their own reusable water bottles and coffee cups
- Video projections were used for branding, conference dinner 'underwater theme'
- Dates were omitted from new banners for reuse at subsequent events
- Non-plastic presents/wrapping used as gifts to plenary speakers

What we missed or resolved along the way:

- Poster session – encourage non-plastic solutions for printing (e.g. cloth)
- Reduce number of bins/plastic bin liners in the venue
- Provide a compost bin for waste (fruit peels, teabags)
- Glass sugar dispensers and teaspoons (reduce need for individual sachets)
- Conference delegate hotels – removing water/coffee pods/hygiene products
- Remove/reduce branding on lanyards so items are reusable (e.g. AMSA2019 to AMSA conference), or
- Hire lanyards rather than purchasing new ones

Remaining challenges – beyond immediate conference planning:

- Plastic wrapping on prepared food (hygiene issues for catering)
- Other services provided to the venue(s) (laundry, food and beverage delivery)
- Straws (non-plastic options, catering for disabilities as appropriate)

What we learned:

- **Plan early.** Going against the grain can take a bit of work, but there are usually plastic-free options available.
- **Work with everyone.** Create a shared goal with your whole team: event organisers, venue, exhibitors, caterers – more ideas make for better solutions. This creates a ripple effect, not only for the event, but in developing more sustainable practice for other events.
- **Do a site visit.** Identify potential problems and devise solutions ahead of time.
- **Don't assume.** Not all suppliers are knowledgeable about sustainable materials, so allow time to talk through what plastic-free and zero-waste really means.
- **Can expand to everyday use.** These practices can be adapted to everyday home, workplace, and public events.

Most importantly, this can be implemented without increasing the budget or impacting the bottom line

Our original article is available at: <https://theconversation.com/we-organised-a-conference-for-570-people-without-using-plastic-heres-how-it-went-120157>

