

Introduction

Welcome to Week 15 of the 2018 Certified Green Office Program! Our topic for this week is Elective Action #19. If you need to, catch up on any of our prior newsletters [here](#).

19. Work with your caterer to reduce packaging and waste in your orders.

As a reminder, completion of five Elective Actions beyond the Required Actions will earn you Bronze level certification, completion of ten will earn Silver level certification, and fifteen Elective Actions will earn Gold level certification.

Instructions

Elective Action #19: Work with your caterer to reduce packaging and waste in your orders.

Those who have never worked in catering or food service do not often realize how much waste results from these industries. Much of it is inherent to food service, and will be difficult to eliminate without a cultural shift away from reliance on these industries or a transformation of the industries themselves. Regardless, there are some steps that can be taken to cut back on some of the waste. Since all catering services are different, the best thing to do is to ask your caterer what they know they can feasibly do, specifically in regards to reducing packaging. However, we do have a few suggestions of what else to ask about below.

Food Waste

Food waste is perhaps the trickiest part of catering waste to deal with. There must be more food than needed for the projected guest count prepared, which immediately opens up the potential for at least a small bit of waste. Then, if significantly less than the guest count attends, or doesn't eat a full portion, there is potential for a large amount of food waste that is unavoidable. One strategy that can help to reduce food waste is to reduce the size of the serving pans that the food is presented in on a buffet line. By using two half-pans or three third-pans in one heating chafer, the rate of replacement of the pans [will be slowed down](#), leading to less food waste. Therefore, you can request your caterer use pans of these sizes, if they have them. (Note: University Catering does have half-pans, but not third-pans). If your caterer only has full-size pans available, then you can ask that they wait until the pan is depleted to a specific point before they replace it.

Another suggestion would be to ask your caterer which dishes are typically the most popular -- don't order something that not many people will like and then leave behind more leftovers than necessary!

Paper Product Waste

The first step here would be to ask your caterer if they use or have available paper products made of recycled or other eco-friendly materials. If not, and your event will be using paper products (napkins, plates, cups, etcetera), we would recommend that you provide your own eco-friendly versions, and let your caterer know that their versions will not be required.

Plastic Product Waste

We would recommend the same steps as for paper waste if your event will be using plastic cups, silverware, etcetera. Make sure you purchase disposable plastic products that are biodegradable and/or compostable instead if your caterer cannot provide them. If there will be beverages in disposable plastic bottles at your event, be sure to collect them separately from the garbage for recycling.

Finally, consider that another option to consider when hosting events that you might normally cater would be to forgo the catering, and have people in your office provide the food instead. Essentially, host a potluck! Individuals making food to share are less likely to over-prepare large amounts of food than a catering operation, and even if they do, it is much easier to take this food home as leftovers. If you do choose to try this option, remember to encourage those preparing food to make it vegetarian or vegan, and to use reusable serving dishes and tools.