



# **A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES ON BEST PLASTIC REDUCTION PRACTICES**

JANUARY 2025

**OCEAN  
WISE**



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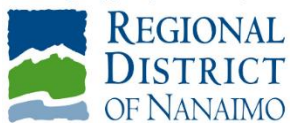
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# INTRODUCTION

## OCEAN WISE

Ocean Wise is a global conservation organization on a mission to build communities that take meaningful action to protect and restore our ocean. Through research, education, innovation, and collaboration, we are turning the tide on three major ocean challenges: **ocean pollution**, **overfishing** and **climate change**. By creating communities of concern that include industries, government, and everyday citizens, we create a future where our ocean and the people who depend on it can thrive.

Ocean Wise is headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia. With staff in Canada, the United States, and Chile, our work impacts communities all around the globe.



## REGIONAL DISTRICT OF NANAIMO

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) provides regional governance and services throughout Vancouver Island's beautiful central east coast. Communities in the regional federation include the municipalities of Nanaimo, Lantzville, Parksville, and Qualicum Beach, as well as seven unincorporated Electoral Areas. Established in 1967, the RDN is British Columbia's fifth most populous regional district. According to Statistics Canada's 2021 census, it is home to 170,367 people.

In recent years, the RDN has been recognized for its leadership in sustainable development, improving services and quality of life for its residents while reducing its communities' environmental footprint and dependence on limited resources.

The RDN's Solid Waste Services Department owns and operates the Regional Landfill, Church Road Transfer Station and provides residential garbage, food waste and recycling collection to more than 29,500 households in the region. It has made a long-term commitment to achieving Zero Waste, reducing garbage, conserving resources, reducing greenhouse gases and creating a more sustainable region.



## WHY PLASTIC REDUCTION?

Plastic is everywhere. Over 348 million metric tons of plastic is produced each year worldwide, and we produce more plastic every year.<sup>1</sup> Forty percent of the plastic produced is single-use or disposable. According to the report by the Pew Charitable Trust (2020), over 11 million tonnes of plastic will end up in the ocean each year, and this number is expected to nearly triple by 2040. Plastic pollution is a major problem for humanity. It causes harm to wildlife through ingestion, suffocation and habitat degradation. Importantly, plastic doesn't break down into organic matter like natural materials do. As plastic is exposed to sun, rain, wind and waves, it breaks up into pieces, but the plastic itself stays intact. The plastic pieces get smaller, but they never go away, causing continuing damage to the ocean.

Sixty percent of all plastics ever manufactured are sitting in landfills or contaminating the natural environment, including our ocean.<sup>2</sup> Climate change, another threat to our planet, is aggravated by the plastic pollution we create; two out of every three breaths we take come from the ocean, created by phytoplankton photosynthesizing carbon dioxide into oxygen. When phytoplankton ingest microplastics, their ability to sequester that carbon is reduced.<sup>2</sup> The more plastic we add to our ocean, the less it can help us mitigate climate change.

These consequences of plastic pollution are alarming. What we also know, however, is that we have almost all the tools we need to reverse the upward trend and stop the flow of plastic into our ocean.<sup>1</sup> We must value plastic for its useful attributes and save it from a life in the ocean by keeping it in our economy. This means we need to recycle the plastic we do have so it can continue to be useful. However, our recycling capabilities can't manage the volume of plastic that we produce. In fact, only nine percent of the plastic waste generated in the world has ever been recycled.<sup>3</sup> The biggest impact we can make to reduce plastic pollution is to stop buying so much plastic in the first place.

This guide will give you suggestions for contributing to this goal through your business. Your commitment to plastic reduction will help eliminate single-use plastics that would otherwise be used briefly and quickly discarded. Importantly, you will also show your community that reducing plastic is simple and attainable.

1. 'A Comprehensive Assessment of Pathways Towards Stopping Ocean Plastic Pollution'. Report by The Pew Charitable Trusts & SYSTEMIQ. 2020
2. Shen, M., Ye, S., et al. (2020). *Can Microplastics pose a threat to ocean carbon sequestration?* Marine Pollution Bulletin, 150.
3. Geyer, R., Jambeck, J. R., & Law, K. L. (2017). *Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made.* Science Advances, 3(7), e1700782





# BEST PRACTICES FOR BUSINESS PLASTIC REDUCTION

## BEST PRACTICE 1: OFFERING REUSABLES TO DINE-IN CUSTOMERS

**Implementing reusable dishware for dine-in service may be the single most important step to cut unnecessary plastic from your front-of-house business operations.**

When all steps of the food and beverage sales process – from ordering and food preparation to consumption and clean-up – happen in the control of your business, we call that a ‘closed system’. Closed systems are a great opportunity to institute reusable dishware. As well as eliminating the waste created from disposables, reusable dishware can: provide an elevated experience for the customer compared to disposable cups or clamshells, allow the creation of a more visually appealing product with branding opportunities, and save space, with multiple waste stations consolidated in a single dish pit.

Instituting reusable dishware in a closed system is a straightforward process. For staff, food and beverages will be made in the usual way, except that a ceramic, durable plastic, stainless steel, or another reusable dish will replace a disposable one. After enjoying their order, guests will place used dishes in a bus tray in a convenient location (i.e. near the waste station or kitchen). An employee will periodically check the bus trays and bring them into the kitchen for dishwashing. This system is common at eat-in dining at cafes and casual eateries and could be a relatively simple change.







Businesses can also encourage guests ordering food for take-out to bring their own cups and containers for servers to fill. A policy outlining the types of cups and containers acceptable for serving, including requirements for cleanliness and size, could be developed to facilitate this. To encourage uptake for this option, businesses could advertise it on their website and in posters or till-toppers within the business. Importantly, staff could also use reusables at work to set the standard for guests that reuse is the social norm – by “walking the walk”, you will help develop a culture of reusables and responsible plastic use.

**To successfully implement a reusable dishware program for your dine-in customers, consider the following steps:**

- **Evaluate your dish washing capabilities before investing in new dishware.** Ensure that your dishwasher can accommodate an increase in volume and usage, while also meeting [BC's provincial policy on reusable containers in food premises](#). Take a look at your storage space. The area currently used for disposable dishes can be repurposed for storing reusables, since you won't be ordering as many.
- **Purchase your reusable dishware by first analyzing your peak sales periods,** such as dinner service in the summer or lunch during back-to-school season. By ordering enough to meet the demands of your busiest times, you'll ensure you have sufficient stock for your quieter periods as well.
- **Establish your procedure.** Depending on your restaurant, you can have servers clear tables and bring dishes to the kitchen or set up a dish return station near your waste bins for customers to return their dishes. Whatever method you choose, ensure it aligns with your existing kitchen processes by considering the entire cycle – service, collection, cleaning and storage.





- **Train your staff on the new procedures you've developed.** Document these procedures in a policy and create educational materials, such as posters or signs, to reinforce the process for reusable dishes. When onboarding new employees, provide them with a copy of the policy and thoroughly explain the process to ensure they align with your established team. Additionally, consider creating customer-facing signage to inform them of the change, explain the importance of plastic reduction to your business, and guide them on returning dishes if applicable.
- **If an item must be served in disposable dishware, we recommend purchasing packaging that is BPI-certified compostable.** This certification ensures the packaging is approved for organics collection by the municipality, allowing customers to dispose of it in their residential organics bin.

### Key Takeaways

1. Replacing disposable dishware with reusables in a closed system reduces plastic waste, enhances customer experience, and allows for branding.
2. Encourage customers to bring their own cups/containers for take-out and promote this option through signage and by setting an example.
3. Ensure your dishwashing and storage capabilities can handle the increased volume of reusables before implementing changes.
4. Create clear procedures for handling reusable dishware, train staff, and use signage to inform customers and employees of the new process.







## BEST PRACTICE 2: SHOPPING RESPONSIBLY

### Smaller businesses can cut plastic waste and emissions by choosing unpackaged and bulk options.

Smaller businesses often buy ingredients in smaller quantities, sometimes directly from the grocery store. When shopping, consider reducing plastic waste by choosing unpackaged fruits and vegetables, skip plastic film bags in favour of reusable cloth bags, and buy concentrated cleaners (like powders) to avoid accumulating plastic bottles. Buying in bulk is also key - purchase dry goods like oats, beans, or coffee unpackaged and refill them from the bulk bins as needed; this is especially important for items bought in smaller quantities.

Whenever possible, we encourage you to purchase locally sourced goods, such as buns and breads from a local baker or produce from a local farm. By reducing the distance these goods travel, you can cut down on plastic packaging and the carbon emissions associated with transport by truck, ship or plane. Building strong relationships with local suppliers also allows for more tailored products that meet your specific needs, helping you purchase exactly what you require and minimize food waste from excess stock.



### Key Takeaways

1. Buy creamers, condiments and dry goods in bulk instead of in single servings to minimize packaging.
2. Bring your own bags to the grocery store.
3. Track your ingredient inventory, including orders, servings and waste, to provide accurate numbers to suppliers.
4. Reduce plastic by buying concentrated cleaners and refilling bottles. This also saves money on packaging and shipping.



## BEST PRACTICE 3: WORKING WITH YOUR SUPPLIERS TO REDUCE WASTE

### Initiate conversations with your suppliers about opportunities to reduce plastic waste.

If your business primarily sources items directly from suppliers, you may have an opportunity to reduce plastic waste by initiating conversations about using less plastic packaging. By expressing your needs to suppliers, you can help create demand for more sustainable options, making them more affordable and convenient to use. This is also a chance to scale your impact through the supply chain, encouraging suppliers to explore packaging alternatives. Building strong relationships with producers who share your values can result in customized solutions that reduce plastic use, such as bulk deliveries or packaging alternatives. Additionally, communicating your business sustainability goals to suppliers and setting shared objectives can ensure alignment and clarity in your efforts. Consider sharing resources like this guide, along with training or information, to support plastic reduction practices across your supply chain.

Whenever possible, we encourage you to purchase locally sourced goods, such as buns and breads from a local baker or produce from a local farm. By reducing the distance these goods travel, you can cut down on plastic packaging and the carbon emissions associated with transport by truck, ship or plane. Building strong relationships with local suppliers also allows for more tailored products that meet your specific needs, helping you purchase exactly what you require and minimize food waste from excess stock.

### Key Takeaways

1. Engage suppliers to reduce plastic packaging and create demand for sustainable options.
2. Build strong relationships with suppliers to find customized solutions that align with your sustainability goals.
3. Share resources, training and information to support plastic reduction practices across your supply chain.
4. Buy from local butchers, bakers and farmers to reduce packaging and shipping waste.





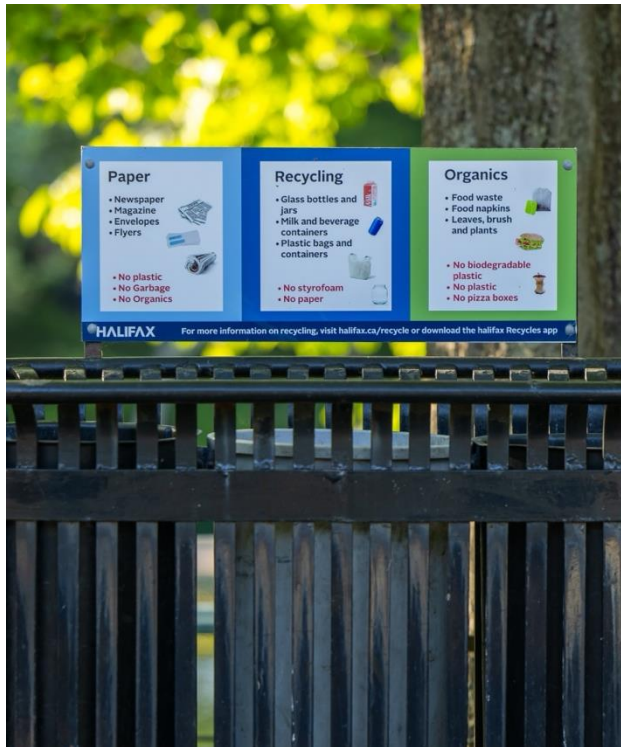
## BEST PRACTICE 4: FINE-TUNING YOUR WASTE-MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

**Establishing a strong waste management system within your business is an essential step you can take today.**

This best practice does not require significant capital purchases or policy changes. A strong waste management policy is essential for helping staff effectively navigate your waste system. Clearly outline staff expectations for using the waste system and incorporate this information into onboarding and regular training. A well-defined policy also provides an easy reference for employees when questions arise about specific items or procedures. You should reference applicable regulations and laws that are in place in the RDN to guide your policy – for example, the RDN is introducing the [Mandatory Waste Source Separation Bylaw](#) in 2025, for which they have released a [three-page guide](#) for businesses. Additionally, you should ensure you are in compliance with the [Single-Use and Plastic Waste Prevention Regulation](#) and the [Single-Use Plastics Prohibition Regulation](#) to help guide you in making strong waste management choices for your business.

Effective waste stations, both front and back of house, promote better sorting and disposal. A well-designed station includes bins for garbage, recyclables, and organics. Without all categories, we end up with “orphaned bins” – bins with unknown use. We encourage replacing small, scattered bins with larger, consolidated stations to foster proper sorting and reduce the use of plastic garbage bags. Larger bins help avoid half-full bags and ensure bags are used efficiently.





Clear, consistent signage is crucial for proper sorting. In both front and back of house, use signs with simple icons or pictures of common items, and when possible, mirror the residential waste system, which people are already familiar with. Adding QR codes or links, like the [RDN's 'What Goes Where?'](#) page, could provide further guidance on trickier items and wise waste disposal actions. It is also recommended that recycling signs include pictures of marine animals, as this has shown [effectiveness in increasing diversion](#). This is particularly impactful in the RDN, where residents have access to the ocean nearby.

Additionally, signage could highlight other efforts customers make to reduce waste, such as bringing reusable cups and containers for take-out, refilling water bottles and only asking for napkins and straws if required. This messaging could include a statement or image telling guests that your business is working towards being plastic free, and that this goal requires the participation of all guests to achieve success.

## Key Takeaways

1. Develop a waste management policy with clear staff expectations, integrated into training, and aligned with local regulations.
2. Use larger consolidated bins for garbage, recyclables, and organics to promote proper sorting and reduce plastic bag use.
3. Implement clear signs to guide sorting, with additional resources like QR codes.
4. Promote reusable items and inform customers about your plastic reduction goals.



## BEST PRACTICE 5: BRINGING RECYCLING PARTNERS ON BOARD

**Businesses must separate waste into landfill, recyclables, and organics, with special care for hazardous materials, while either self-hauling or using a waste service provider, ensuring proper waste station setup and adherence to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).**

Businesses must separate their waste into at least three categories: landfill, recyclables, and organics. Certain materials, such as batteries, cleaning supplies (especially if there is still liquid inside), flammable liquids, and some other hazardous substances, are prohibited from the landfill. For the most up to date drop-off locations, check the [RDN Waste Wizard](#).

Businesses are responsible for removing waste, recycling and organics from their premises. Some small businesses can 'self-haul', meaning they transport waste to the landfill themselves. While this option is the most cost-effective, it can be time-consuming and messy. To minimize costs and time, a focus on recycling and organics diversion, and overall waste reduction is essential.



Alternatively, a waste service provider ("garbage company") can supply your business with a dumpster, or totes (2-wheeled plastic containers) for waste collection. To properly set up your waste collection area, consider the following:

- Keep it clean and well lit.
- Provide a table for staff to organize recyclables, if space allows.
- Cover outdoor areas to encourage proper waste sorting.
- Ensure clear signage for both staff and service providers.
- Paint the walls to create a dedicated waste space.

Please see Appendix A for a list of waste management providers in the Regional District of Nanaimo.





## Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

EPR programs in British Columbia hold producers accountable for the entire lifecycle of their products, including disposal and recycling. These programs aim to reduce waste and promote recycling by ensuring producers manage the end-of-life of their products.

For Quick Serve Restaurants (QSRs), the most relevant EPR is the Return-It (Encorp) program, which manages beverage containers. This program collects beverage containers like pop cans, juice boxes, and ready-to-drink milk containers. Note that products like oat milk (Barista version or half-and-half cream) is not considered ready-to-drink, but 2% milk or regular oat milk is.

These beverage containers can be returned to a bottle depot for a refund or may be collected in larger quantities, although you may receive a reduced refund, or none. QSRs should also be aware of RecycleBC guidelines to ensure their takeout containers are eligible for the program. If branded containers are used, you may be liable to pay into the RecycleBC program as a producer.

Other EPR programs exist in BC, although most QSRs will not make regular use of them. More information on them can be found at the [Recycling Council of BC](https://www.recyclingcouncil.bc.ca/) website.

### Key Takeaways

1. Separate waste into key categories: waste, recyclables, and organics, with special attention to hazardous materials like batteries and cleaning supplies.
2. Small businesses can self-haul waste for cost savings or hire a waste service provider for easier collection.
3. Set up an organized waste area that is clean, well-lit and organized with clear signage and if possible, located in a covered outdoor space to promote proper sorting.
4. Gain an understanding of extended producer responsibility to ensure compliance and avoid extra costs.



## CONCLUSION

Incorporating plastic reduction practices into operations is a powerful step businesses can take on their own to reduce waste and minimize environmental impact. By switching to reusable dishware for dine-in customers, implementing habits like purchasing local and unpackaged goods, and engaging in meaningful conversations with suppliers about reducing plastic packaging, you can significantly decrease your plastic footprint. Establishing a comprehensive waste management system, with clear signage and efficient sorting practices, ensures proper disposal and recycling within your business. By leveraging EPR programs and selecting eco-friendly packaging, your business can stay aligned with both regional and provincial waste reduction efforts. Together, these practices not only foster a more sustainable operation, but also set a strong example for both staff and customers in reducing plastic waste and supporting a circular economy.





# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A – LIST OF WASTE MANAGEMENT PROVIDERS

Here are several waste management providers in the RDN. Please keep in mind that this list is not exhaustive.

Provider Name	Streams Serviced	Locations Serviced	Contact Information
Cascades Recovery	Recycling (drop off)	Nanaimo	250-722-3396 <a href="#">Cascades Recovery+ Nanaimo - Cascades</a>
Convertus Nanaimo	Organics	Nanaimo	250-722-4614 <a href="mailto:nanaimo@convertusgroup.com">nanaimo@convertusgroup.com</a> <a href="#">Convertus Advanced Composting Facility, Nanaimo BC</a>
Emterra Environmental	Garbage, recycling, organics	Nanaimo (call for availability)	250-716-3340 <a href="#">Business Solutions - Emterra Group</a>
Environmental 360S	Garbage, recycling	Nanaimo	250-722-3885 <a href="#">Commercial &amp; Industrial - Environmental 360 Solutions</a>
GFL Environmental	Garbage, recycling, and organics	Nanaimo, Parksville, Qualicum Beach	250-245-9887 <a href="#">Solid Waste Mid-Island Branch Page   GFL Environmental</a>
Waste Connections	Garbage, recycling and organics	Nanaimo, Parksville, Qualicum Beach	250-716-9005 <a href="#">Waste Connections of Canada</a>
Waste Management	Garbage, recycling and organics	Nanaimo, Parksville, Qualicum Beach	800-774-9748 <a href="#">Waste, Garbage and Recycling Services in Nanaimo, British Columbia   WM</a>