

# Greener Events

***A guide to reducing the environmental impacts of conferences and seminars***

Comments received:

***“a great checklist!”***

***“just received this guide and would like to say that I will be very pleased to adopt it”***

***“a very simple and informative guide. Even for us, a venue, this guide is very useful”***

**Produced by the Government Office for the South West and recommended by**

Sustainability South West  
Environment Agency (SW)  
South West of England Regional Development Agency  
South West Local Government Association

and at national level by

Envirowise & the Sustainable Development Commission



# GREENER EVENTS CHECKLIST

- for discussions between event managers and venues

## Venue choice (and audio visual)

- Choose a venue that has good access via public transport & for disabled people
- Ask potential venues for their in-house environmental policy & priorities
- Choose a venue interested in sustainability issues, and tell them that's why you chose them
- Venues offering in-house technical equipment & support (e.g. staging, audio-visual) can reduce equipment transportation
- Consider video conferencing and/or recording the event for wider access via the internet

## CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions (including travel)

(see "Reducing Waste" checklist also)

- Take measures to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from delegates travelling to the venue, i.e. provide information about local public transport (with pedestrian routes) and encourage its use. Where appropriate promote car sharing e.g. circulate attendees list in advance
- Minimise unnecessary lighting, heating / air-conditioning
- Offset CO<sub>2</sub> emissions arising from the event

## Catering & Locally Produced Food

- Plan food requirements carefully to avoid unnecessary waste (e.g. use event registration form to obtain information)
- Ensure that dietary requirements are catered for and offer vegetarian choices
- Plan meals using seasonal local produce wherever possible. Consider organic produce
- If serving fish, use fish from sustainable sources
- Wherever possible ensure fruit is provided as an alternative to sweet desserts
- Left over food: consider donating to local charity or sending for local composting
- Ensure tea/coffee is Fair Trade & provide tap water as an alternative (if you must use bottled water, make sure it is local!)
- Minimise use of individually packaged food/drink items (e.g. provide milk / cream in jugs rather than individual plastic cartons)
- Use reusable crockery, glassware & cutlery where possible (to reduce waste)

**This is part of "Greener Events", a guide on reducing the environmental impacts of conferences and seminars. There are also companion guides on outdoor/community events, presentations & on exhibiting at events. These are all available from the BUSINESS page of [www.oursouthwest.com](http://www.oursouthwest.com)**

## Reducing Waste (& costs)

### Pre Event:

- Use websites & emailing lists to promote the event
- Use double-sided printing for promotional materials & handouts. Use recycled paper where possible
- Use easily transportable & reusable display materials
- Seek naturally lighted meeting & exhibition areas
- Format any handouts so as to minimise the amount of paper used
- Where possible, write material in a re-usable format (general rather than event specific)
- Minimise the length of the registration form or use electronic registration where possible & publish the event itinerary on-line
- Ask the venue to recycle paper & cardboard waste etc – and to provide suitable recycling bins
- If required, make your own note pads from scrap paper

### At the Event:

- If you are providing delegate packs (if in a folder, make it re-usable), give these to delegates when they register on arrival – not beforehand – to avoid duplication
- Avoid mass distribution of handouts - allow attendees to download copies from the internet
- Ensure presenters are aware of electronic presentation facilities & that their presentation will be distributed electronically after the event
- Provide re-usable name badges (& remember to collect them at the end of the event!)
- Minimise use of accessories that are harmful to the environment (e.g. plastic leaflet wallets)
- Feature conference name & date on title slide rather than single use stage set graphics
- Minimise use of high wattage stage lighting
- Promote energy & water efficiency to participants – e.g. switch off lights when rooms are not in use
- Use drymark eraser boards rather than paper in workshop presentations
- Request that any unused items be collected for use at another event
- Consider including a sustainability activity/session within the conference to raise awareness

### Post Event:

- If not issued at the event, send out delegate feedback questionnaire by email
- Give any feedback you have to the venue

## Introduction

“What a business produces, how it buys and sells, how it affects the environment, how it recruits, trains and develops its own people, how it invests in the community and respects the rights of people - all these add together to form the impact of that business on society”  
- Business in the Community

There are many ways organisations can improve their contribution to sustainable development and reduce their environmental impacts but one area that is often overlooked is the use of resources and the release of carbon dioxide emissions associated with conferences and seminars.

The increased use of video conferencing facilities is helping to reduce the need to travel for small meetings. However for conferences and seminars, where there is a specific need to gather many delegates and speakers together in one place, there are significant opportunities available for ensuring that environmental impacts are minimised.

Keep in mind that you cannot expect to improve everything at once but you can make a start on several key aspects of event management. Decide on what's important to you and everyone involved and aim for continuous improvement with how you organise and deliver your events.

## Using this guide

This guide has been produced to help event managers reduce some of the negative environmental impacts that large conferences and seminars can have on the environment and suggests ways in which these can be minimised or eliminated - whilst providing social and economic benefits also.

It is recommended that this guide is used to help select a suitable venue and to aid planning discussions with management and staff at the chosen venue. A copy should be passed to the venue manager by the event manager.

The **GREENER EVENTS CHECKLIST** within

this guide can be discussed with the venue manager during the early negotiations in the course of planning the event.

## Key Factors

The key factors to consider when organising or supporting events are

1. **Venue Choice (and audio visual)**
2. **CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions**
3. **Locally Produced Food**
4. **Reducing Waste (& costs)**

### 1. Venue Choice (and audio visual)

Suitability of the venue can mean more than just its layout and facilities. Other facilities or amenities in the area and appropriateness for the theme of the event can be important factors. However, where possible, venues chosen should:

be close to public transport which reduces the need for delegates to travel by car; and

have good in-house green housekeeping policies that include active promotion of recycling, energy efficiency and purchasing locally produced food or using suppliers that use local produce.

Note. For hotels, the 'Green Tourism Business Scheme' includes a green audit.

To maximise access to information whilst reducing environmental impacts, consider recording (audio, video, or video linked to slides) your event for subsequent access via the internet. This can ensure many more people take advantage of the information afterwards - thus greatly improving the return on investment from your event - and delegates can re-visit the elements that are important to them.

### 2. CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions

Wherever possible, larger regional conferences and seminars, i.e. those attracting around 50+ delegates, should be arranged as “carbon neutral” events so that these events do not make a net contribution to global warming that leads to climate change.

## 2. CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions (continued)

This means event managers need to:

Firstly: reduce the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions arising from energy use by encouraging delegates to travel to the venue by public transport or car sharing. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at the venue itself can be reduced by pursuing energy efficiency measures and some venues may even use less polluting energy sources, i.e. renewable energy.

Secondly: offset the unavoidable CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by purchasing “carbon offsets”.

Carbon can be offset via specialist companies/organisations that invest in technologies that reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (energy efficiency and renewable energy) or by sequestering carbon (and thus absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>) through tree planting.

### *Example of a climate neutral event*

Since 2001 ENVEC, the South West’s annual climate change conference organised by the Government Office for the South West and others, has been carbon neutral.

Each year ENVEC attracts some 250-300 delegates. Based on these numbers and taking account of carbon saving measures and energy used at the conference venue, ENVEC offsets 12 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. For further details visit the ENVEC website at: [www.oursouthwest.com/envec](http://www.oursouthwest.com/envec).

If your organisation is supporting or managing several events during the year, it may be sensible, and reduce administrative costs, to purchase the carbon offset centrally in one single payment to the carbon offset company/organisation. You should check this with your Central Services Department or Finance Team.

There are several companies/organisations that provide carbon offsets through investing in low carbon technologies, forest restoration projects etc. These include:

**Climate Care**  
[www.jpmorganclimatecare.com](http://www.jpmorganclimatecare.com)

**Co2balance**  
[www.co2balance.com](http://www.co2balance.com)

**The Carbon Neutral Company**  
[www.carbonneutral.com](http://www.carbonneutral.com)

**CLEVEL**  
[www.clevel.co.uk](http://www.clevel.co.uk)

Note. Inclusion in the above list does not represent an endorsement of those companies by this guide, merely an acknowledgement of their existence.

The websites of most companies that provide carbon offsets can show you how to calculate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

It may be possible in some instances for the investment to be made in your region – this can be discussed with the carbon offset company.

The important point to note is that any investment should provide new and additional carbon savings/sequestration that would not otherwise happen. Simply subsidising projects that are already planned would not provide a true carbon offset for your event.

For further information on carbon offsetting see the link on this guide’s web page (on the BUSINESS page of [www.oursouthwest.com](http://www.oursouthwest.com)). Business Link ([www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)) can also provide further guidance on carbon offsetting.

### *The Low Carbon Hierarchy*

The most cost-effective solution for reducing your carbon footprint is to:

**1. REDUCE** energy use by avoiding unnecessary use and implementing energy efficiency measures. You should include the design of your goods and services and also look up and down your supply chain. Once you have increased your efficiency you should then look to

**2. REPLACE** fossil fuels with renewable energy sources and/or use cleaner fossil fuel technology such as Combined Heat and Power (CHP) where it is feasible to do so. Finally, having reduced your carbon emissions through avoiding waste, energy efficiency and use of renewable cleaner sources, you can

**3. NEUTRALISE** the remaining unavoidable emissions through carbon offsetting schemes.

### 3. Locally Produced Food

There are good reasons for supporting the local food sector by using local food produced in the local area (or within the region) wherever possible:

**Economic** – essentially purchasing local food helps keep money in the local economy, creating/maintaining jobs and prosperity for the local (predominantly rural) workforce. The Sustainable Development Commission estimates that every £10 spent locally generates £25 for the local economy – the local multiplier effect.

**Social** - local food marketing makes consumers more aware of and interested in the origin of food, helping to improve their links with and understanding of the rural economy, food production, land management and rural community issues. Furthermore, the local multiplier effect can help improve the standard of living in poorer communities allowing people to afford more nutritious food that's better for their health.

**Environmental** - local foods can provide an important added value outlet for the products of traditional (and more extensive) farming systems that conserve landscape and biodiversity. Food miles, the distance food travels from producer to end-user, are also reduced thus reducing the air pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with transport.

### 4. Reducing Waste (& costs)

Waste represents one of the major environmental challenges facing the UK. In England and Wales, for example, over 100 million tonnes of household, industrial and commercial waste is produced annually. We are running out of space for putting waste into landfill and this is not the best or safest approach to dealing with waste.

It makes good business sense for the venue also if its waste disposal costs associated with your event can be minimised (*see also Section 2 "Reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions" concerning the need to reduce energy waste*). It is increasingly important, therefore, that event managers minimise the waste of resources associated with their events - and this will have the added benefit of helping to reduce the cost of running the event.

In addition to energy use the other main resource used at events is paper and printing materials, much of which ends up as waste within days. Don't hand out expensive literature liberally; over 60% of exhibition handouts, for example, is thrown away.

If you feel the need to provide your delegates with free gifts ('freebies'), make sure that they are at least useful, re-usable and, where possible, made from sustainable materials.

### The Greener Events Checklist

The single page "**Greener Events Checklist**" within this guide is provided to help event managers discuss their requirements with potential venues.

Event managers can refer the guide to potential venues to highlight the fact that these are the range and type of issues to be addressed in choosing the venue as well as in organising and running the event.

The checklist can also serve as an aide memoir when discussing options with the chosen venue's management.

Venues can also use this guide and the checklist to help ensure events held on their premises have a lower impact on the environment.

### And finally...

Don't forget to tell your delegates that the event has been arranged in partnership with the venue to specifically reduce the event's environmental impact (low CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, climate neutral, locally sourced food, and reduction in waste). You could also use the following wording on your event programme/ invitation: Organised in accordance with the principles of the nationally recognised "Greener Events" guide (on [www.oursouthwest.com](http://www.oursouthwest.com)).

Alternatively you could use the special "Greener Events" logo from the [www.oursouthwest.com](http://www.oursouthwest.com) website.

**Note:** This guide (& its companion guides on outdoor/community events, presentations and exhibiting at events) will be updated periodically. Users are therefore advised to make sure they are using the latest version(s) posted on [www.oursouthwest.com](http://www.oursouthwest.com) when event planning.