

Guidelines for sustainable stand construction

Thank you for reading this guide.
Creating a low impact trade show relies on collective effort from everyone involved. We've devised some easy actions you can take to reduce the environmental impact of stand construction.





What is sustainability?

Sustainability means being effective today without compromising the future.
It includes:

- **Economic sustainability:** contributing to and promoting fair economic growth; supporting innovation and entrepreneurship; guaranteeing shared wealth
- **Environmental sustainability:** committing to a rational use of natural resources and taking action for their renewal
- **Social sustainability:** promoting social justice and fighting inequality. Creating business growth while improving quality of life.

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1. Stand design

When producing an exhibition stand consider:

- Stand construction materials
- Consumables
- Promotional materials
- Packaging
- Accessibility

All the materials you use at the exhibition, for building the stand and for promotion as well as consumables and packaging should follow the five Rs:

- **Rethink:** replace dangerous chemicals or materials with others that are less harmful to people and planet
- **Reduce:** reduce volume and weight
- **Reuse:** reuse materials
- **Repair:** repair damaged materials instead of throwing them away
- **Recycle:** give a use to materials that would otherwise be thrown away

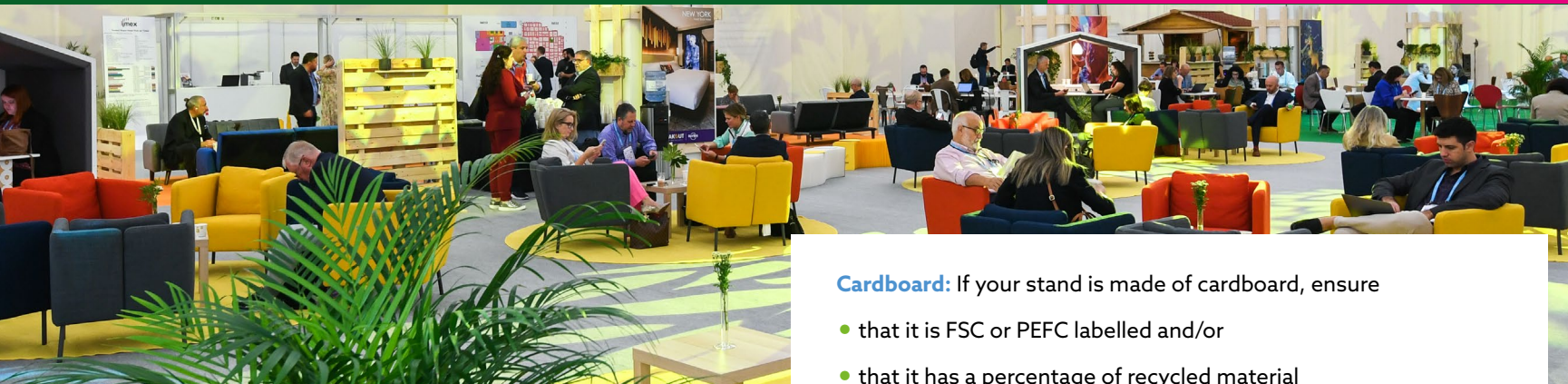
Also ensure your stand is accessible to wheelchair users, by installing a bevel (or ramp for higher floors). Consider your stand layout and ensure wheelchair users can move around easily.



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1. Stand design



Stand construction materials

Wood: When using wood or wooden elements for your stand, ensure:

- that it is FSC or PEFC labelled and/or
- that it has a certain percentage of recycled material and/or
- that you know how its reuse will be monitored long term

When the wood can no longer be reused, you must guarantee its transport to an authorised waste management facility for recycling, or you should arrange recycling through the exhibition venue.

Aluminium: When using an aluminium frame construction, ensure:

- that it comes from manufacturers that use 100% renewable energy and/or
- that the manufacturer has an environmental management system certified to ISO 14001 or EMAS standards, or equivalent
- that you reuse the aluminium and when it is no longer in use, that you take it to an authorised waste management facility for recycling. Aluminium is indefinitely recyclable.

Cardboard: If your stand is made of cardboard, ensure

- that it is FSC or PEFC labelled and/or
- that it has a percentage of recycled material

When no longer in use, you must guarantee its transport to an authorised waste management facility for recycling, or you should arrange recycling through the exhibition venue.

Note that cardboard is often subject to fire safety regulations. Check with the venue before using cardboard.

Textiles: When using textiles, use:

- textiles that have a recycled percentage (e.g. recycled plastic bottles, fishing nets, tyres, recycled polyester, cotton or wool) and/or
- textiles made from organic materials (e.g. organic cotton, tree fibres, bamboo fibre, orange fibres, pineapple leaves, coffee grounds).

Talk to the exhibition organiser to ask if they are donating leftover textiles to local social organisations. Or seek out local organisations that can give textiles further use yourself, e.g. making bags, backpacks, clothing, tablecloths, wallets, mats, aprons or shoe soles.

Reuse textiles in your own organisation, e.g. as padding or floor protection in your office.

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1. Stand design



Signage

- Design and word signage so that it can be stored and reused multiple times
- Do not use Bioflex, Vinyl or PET. Instead choose organic material that is compostable or at least biodegradable i.e. made from renewable raw materials, such as corn, cassava, potatoes or wheat
- Avoid foamcore; use Re-board or Falconboard instead

Lighting

- Use efficient LED or similar energy-saving lighting
- If renewable electricity is offered at the venue, choose this

Decorative plants

- Use natural plants over faux
- Choose potted plants over cut flowers. Rent rather than buy from the floral supplier
- Plan their destination after the event (e.g. donate them to a local social organisation)

Packaging

- Make an accurate assessment of the materials you'll need on your stand to reduce the need for transport and packaging, and to reduce waste
- Packaging should be kept to a minimum (e.g. reduce volume by eliminating unnecessary filling; reduce waste by reducing the strapping required)
- Source packaging that can be used both when taking materials to your stand and when removing them
- Packaging material (wood, cardboard etc.) should be recyclable, made of recycled components and FSC or PEFC labelled
- Fillings should be paper or cardboard not plastic
- Textile and metal strapping should be used instead of plastic
- Never use Styrofoam as it does not degrade or break down. It goes straight to landfill and leaches harmful chemicals into the environment
- Do not use plastic film

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2. Setting up your exhibition stand

Set-up period

- Follow the organiser's set-up schedule. Working on your stand outside the set hours directly affects the energy needed to keep the exhibition hall open and functioning
- Use efficient, low energy consumption equipment
- Turn off equipment when not in use or use a timer

Safety

- All staff working on the set-up must use personal protective equipment
- You must comply with legal health and safety requirements, and any other rule or instruction from the organiser or venue
- All equipment must undergo regular maintenance and safety checks

Chemical products

Use non-hazardous chemicals with a low VOC rating e.g. water-based paint instead of solvent-based, and natural inks instead of synthetic

Waste

As set out in the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, by 2025, only 40% of waste will be permitted to go to landfill, the rest will have to be recycled or recovered. This percentage will fall to 10% by 2030.



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2. Setting up your exhibition stand

Because excessive waste and inadequate treatment of waste is one of the main environmental issues for exhibitions, it is essential at the set-up stage to:

- consider using materials or packaging that generate less waste at the end of the material's life cycle e.g. less volume or less weight
- consider using materials that can be reused at other exhibitions e.g. stand construction materials that can be reused over and over at other exhibitions
- consider using materials, which, if they cannot be reduced or reused, can be recycled by taking them to authorised recycling facilities. Ask the exhibition organiser about waste recycling

Be aware of the kind of waste you are producing and be responsible for its management. You should comply with the level of separation set out below, and should send all waste, except for untreatable waste (waste that cannot be recycled), to an authorised waste management facility for reuse or recycling.

You must separate the waste generated by the stand into paper/cardboard, containers, organic, glass, wood, textiles or untreatable waste. All waste must be sent to an authorised waste management facility for recycling, except for untreatable waste.

Separating waste at source is vital. Contaminated waste, e.g. food mixed with paper, means all the waste goes to landfill. Place clearly labelled bins for separate waste streams to embed recycling behaviour at the throwaway point and brief your staff accordingly.

Packaging

Save packaging for later reuse. Follow the recommendations described in section 1. Stand design – packaging.

Transport

Follow the recommendations described in section 3. Breakdown



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3. Breakdown



Breakdown, together with the set-up period, produces the most waste. Your goals are:

- **Reduction of volume and weight of waste generated**
- **Recovery**
- **Waste separation**

Particularly as time allowed for breakdown is very limited, planning is essential.

1. Reduce the volume and weight of waste generated.

When planning stands with exhibitors, think of the benefits of producing a stand that you can reuse at multiple events, not just for better sustainability, but also for cost efficiency

If the whole stand is being reused, follow the packaging and transport guidelines from sections 1 and 4.

If the whole stand is not being reused, consider partial reuse. Analyse stand components to determine whether there are any that can be reused (e.g. wood, aluminium, cardboard, screws, tarpaulins, lighting, wiring, carpets, plants etc.). If materials will not be reused by your organisation find out if they can be donated. Textiles can be donated to social organisations to produce other materials/products (e.g. tarpaulins can be recycled to make bags), natural plants can be sent to local social organisations to be replanted. Unused food can also be donated.

Reusing stored packaging from set-up also reduces waste.

2 and 3. Recovery and waste separation

Think about what materials can be recovered. Often single-use laminate flooring can be recovered to be reused as underlay for new stands. Materials that cannot be reused or have to be disposed of must be managed as waste.

You are responsible for the correct disposal of stand waste. You should comply with the level of separation described below and send all waste, except for untreatable waste, to an authorised waste management facility for reuse or recycling.

4. You must separate waste generated during breakdown into the following categories: paper/cardboard, containers, organic, textiles, glass, wood, PVC and untreatable waste. All of these must be sent to an authorised waste management company for recycling, except for untreatable waste, (all waste that cannot be recycled).

5. Transport

As far as possible, all stand construction materials, consumables and exhibition materials should be sourced from local suppliers. Any transport used should be low emission. Avoid air freight.

- Select the smallest vehicle to fit your load
- Use alternative fuel vehicles (natural gas, hybrid, electric etc.) as much as possible
- Vehicles should use properly inflated, low rolling resistance tyres (A or B)
- Plan the most direct routes with the lowest congestion
- Reduce vehicle speed

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4. Transport

Staff travel

- Where possible, staff should travel by train. If travelling by plane, choose airlines that strive to reduce the environmental impact of their flights (e.g. more efficient planes, lighter planes, planes that emit less greenhouse gas, using compostable or glass containers rather than plastic on board, carbon footprint compensation schemes, recycling on board waste) and that collaborate with social organisations
- At the destination, travel to your hotel and around the destination on public transport or exhibition shuttle buses
- Choose accommodation with an easy public transport route to the exhibition, or choose accommodation that has shuttle buses to the exhibition
- If you use your own car, consider ride-share
- For car rentals, choose electric or low-emission

Share your learnings

Thank you for helping to reduce the impact of exhibiting on the environment. Be proud of your sustainability efforts and share your stories and achievements. Lead by example and champion your success!

We'd love to hear about your best practices. If you'd like to share examples or new ideas with us, please post them [here](#).



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