

# Going Zero Waste:

## A How-to Guide for Businesses

Is your business ready to go zero waste? If so, this fact sheet offers an introduction to the concept of zero waste, how it works, and what you need to do to implement zero waste practices at your business.



### What's the difference between traditional and zero waste management?

Landfilling. Incineration. Recycling. These are common ways that businesses get rid of waste, but they can cause permanent environmental damage and generate harmful air emissions. What's more, traditional waste disposal can be costly.

Alternatively, zero waste management focuses on reducing waste and diverts waste away from landfilling. Diversion may include increased recycling, composting, donating, energy recovery, and reuse to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of waste while also creating new cost efficiencies.

### What does it mean to "go zero waste"?

Using sustainable methods like source reduction and maximizing diversion, a zero waste company sends minimal amounts of waste to traditional disposal pathways like landfills and incinerators.

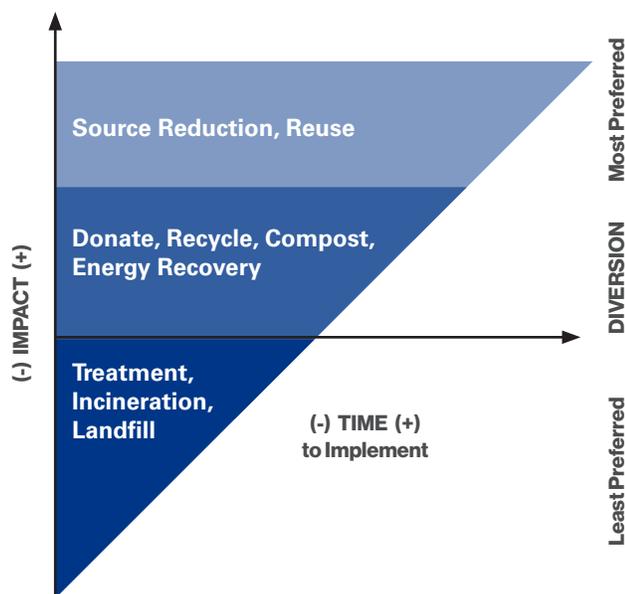
Zero waste efforts can be measured by calculating a business's diversion rate using the following formula:

$$\text{Diversion rate} = \frac{\text{Weight of waste diverted from landfill}}{\text{Total weight of waste generated}}$$

A business that goes zero waste aims to achieve a diversion rate that ranges from 90% to 100%.

### What are the benefits of going zero waste?

- Save money by cutting operating costs.
- Increase brand value.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Increase operational efficiency and manage risk.
- Reduce reliance on limited landfill space.
- Demonstrate environmental corporate responsibility.



## What steps would my business need to take to go zero waste?

Step 1: Define a goal and commit to it.	Step 3: Analyze your data to reduce waste and increase diversion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Align your strategy to a diversion-rate goal</b> guided by an organization (outlined below).</li> <li>• <b>Get buy-in from top management</b> to ensure goal alignment throughout the company.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use the data collected in Step 2</b> to find opportunities for improving your waste-generation practices such as increased recycling and enabling source reduction.</li> <li>• <b>Normalize your data</b> by tying it to a production or sales unit. This will help you to make insightful comparisons across different processes or products to prioritize different tactics.</li> <li>• <b>Learn what other businesses are doing</b> to reduce and prevent waste to inform your own strategy.</li> </ul>
Step 2: Measure and assess your waste generation.	Step 4: Monitor your progress to improve your results.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify and categorize all your waste streams</b> (e.g., general trash and industrial waste, recycled materials, and hazardous waste).</li> <li>• <b>Assess and quantify each waste stream.</b> Where is waste generated? How is it collected (e.g., bins or dumpsters)? How much is generated?</li> <li>• <b>Establish baseline data</b> against which improvement can be measured. Data points should include the cost of sending waste offsite for processing and the business's existing diversion rate (see formula above).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Set up a dedicated team or committee</b> that represents the whole of your business's activities.</li> <li>• <b>Use visually informative (words and pictures) and/or color-coded bins</b> for collecting different waste streams. Be sure to train staff adequately on how to use the bins and why they are being used.</li> <li>• <b>Audit the contents</b> of waste-stream bins regularly to track effectiveness.</li> </ul>

## Can a company be certified as zero waste?

As of yet, there is no single, uniform definition for what qualifies as a zero waste business. However, several organizations (listed below) now provide standards that you can use to formally certify your business as zero waste.

Organization	Designation	Diversion Rate Threshold(s)
<a href="#">Green Business Certification, Inc. (GBCI)</a>	TRUE Certification	90%
<a href="#">Intertek</a>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Zero Waste to Landfill</li> <li>2. Near Zero Waste to Landfill</li> <li>3. Advanced Waste Diversion</li> </ol>	99% 95%-99% 85%-95%
<a href="#">NSF International</a>	Landfill-free Verification	99%
<a href="#">UL Environment</a>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Platinum</li> <li>2. Gold</li> <li>3. Silver</li> </ol>	100% 95 - 99% 90 - 94%

## Want to learn more about going zero waste with NYSP2I?

- Visit the NYSP2I website ([www.rit.edu/affiliate/nysp2i](http://www.rit.edu/affiliate/nysp2i)) to read case studies about companies that have gone zero waste and learn more about a sustainable supply chain.
- Contact **Trish Donohue**, program manager, at [podasp@rit.edu](mailto:podasp@rit.edu) or **(585) 475-7869**.