

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”

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and recommended by**

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GOVERNMENT OFFICE
FOR THE SOUTH WEST



**Sustainable
Development Commission**



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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

"Securing the future", the UK's sustainable development strategy launched by the Prime Minister in March 2005, places a strong emphasis on the need to live within environmental limits, i.e. respecting the limits of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity. The Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) shows that by applying sustainability principles we can achieve lasting economic prosperity and social justice, whilst living within our environmental limits.

There are many ways organisations can 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.

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** at the

end of the 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**
2. **CO₂ Emissions**
3. **Locally Produced Food**
4. **Reducing Waste (& costs)**

1. Venue Choice

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.

2. CO₂ 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.

This means event managers need to:

Firstly: reduce the carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions arising from energy use by encouraging delegates to travel to the venue by public transport or car sharing. CO₂ emissions at the venue itself can be reduced by pursuing energy efficiency measures or some venues may even use less polluting energy sources, i.e. renewable energy.

Secondly: offset the unavoidable CO₂ emissions by purchasing “carbon offsets”.

2. CO₂ Emissions (continued)

Carbon can be offset via specialist companies/organisations that invest in technologies that reduce CO₂ emissions (energy efficiency and renewable energy) or by sequestering carbon (and thus absorbing CO₂) through tree planting.

Example of a climate neutral event

Since 2001 ENVEC (the South West's annual energy & environmental management conference and exhibition organised by the Government Office for the South West and others) has been carbon neutral. Each ENVEC attracts some 250 delegates and 100 exhibition staff. Based on these numbers and taking account of energy used at the conference venue, ENVEC offsets 12 tonnes of CO₂ at a cost of £78 (£6.50/tonne at 2005 prices) via Climate Care (www.climatecare.org).

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 including:

Climate Care, Oxford, www.climatecare.org
- invests in energy efficiency, renewable energy and forest restoration projects

Co2balance, Taunton, www.co2balance.com
- invests in tree planting (owns land in Devon)

The Carbon Neutral Company, London, www.carbonneutral.com - invests in forestry and climate friendly technologies (previously known as Future Forests)

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 CO₂ 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).



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 CO₂ emissions associated with transport.

4. Reducing Waste (& costs)

Waste represents one of the major environmental challenges facing the UK. The UK produces around 400 million tonnes of waste 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.

Improving performance on managing and reducing waste is a crucial part of the UK's sustainable development strategy. 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 CO₂ 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. And much of this ends up as waste within days. Don't hand out expensive literature liberally; over 60% of exhibition handouts, for example, is thrown away.

The Greener Events Checklist

The single page "**Greener Events Checklist**" on page 5 of 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 CO₂ 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)

Alternatively you could use the special "Greener Events" logo from the www.oursouthwest.com website.

Note: This guide will be updated periodically to keep it relevant and up-to-date. Users are therefore advised to make sure they are using the latest version posted on www.oursouthwest.com when planning their events.

See next page for "Greener Events Checklist" →



GREENER EVENTS CHECKLIST

Venue choice

- Choose a venue that has good public transport access
- Ask potential venues for their in-house environmental policy
- Venues offering in-house technical equipment & support (e.g. staging, audio-visual) can reduce equipment transportation
- Choose a venue that is interested in doing more to become green/sustainable, and let them know that this is the reason why you selected them (see “Catering & Locally Produced Food” and “Reducing Waste” checklist items below also)
- Consider the use of video conferencing

CO₂ Emissions (including travel)

(see “Reducing Waste” checklist also)

- Take measures to reduce CO₂ emissions from delegates travelling to the venue, i.e. provide information about local public transport and encourage its use. Where appropriate promote car sharing
- Offset the CO₂ emissions arising from your event

Catering & Locally Produced Food

- Ensure that dietary requirements are catered for (you can use the event registration form to obtain this information)
- Plan meals using seasonal local produce wherever possible. Organic produce should also be considered
- Wherever possible ensure fruit is provided as an alternative to sweet desserts
- Plan food requirements carefully to avoid unnecessary waste
- Ensure tea/coffee is Fair Trade & provide tap water as an alternative (if you must use bottled water, make sure it is local!)
- Ask venue to provide milk / cream in jugs rather than individual plastic cartons (to reduce waste)

“Greener Events” - A guide to reducing the environmental impacts of conferences and seminars - published on the BUSINESS page of www.oursouthwest.com where other sources of guidance, management tools and support programmes can be found

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 practicable
- Use portable display materials (easily transported by an attendee & can be re-used)
- 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
- Make your own note pads from scrap paper

During the Event:

- If you are providing delegate packs, 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 holding 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

Post Event:

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