Sustainable Purchasing Guide

Reusable Food Service Ware

Use this Guide When Purchasing or Renting

- Reusable food service ware items including, but not limited to: cups, mugs, pitchers, plates, bowls, trays, serving dishes, straws, storage containers, and utensils
- Catering services
- Event/meeting planning services

Compared to single-use disposable food service ware, reusables prevent waste and save money. Reusables are typically a great fit for dining-in applications (e.g., breakrooms, cafeterias); recurring meal programs; and meetings, events, and conferences where food will be served. When selecting the best type of reusable food service ware to invest in, take into account performance needs, heat tolerance (e.g., in microwaves or dishwashers), chemical tolerance (e.g., to dishwashing sanitizers), and durability.

Purchasing Requirements

When seeking these products in a store or online, check the product details to confirm that it meets the Minimum Requirements listed below. Also work with caterers and event/meeting planners to prioritize reusables that meet the following requirements. Formal procurement specifications should also incorporate the Minimum Requirements and any applicable Leadership criteria.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS/SPECIFICATIONS	LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

• Product is made only of glass, stainless steel, ceramics (e.g., stoneware, bone china, porcelain), solid wood, silicone, or polypropylene (#5) plastic*.
• Product does not have a Prop 65 warning label indicating that the product contains a chemical that is known to the State of California to cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm.
 	
**Referring to polypropylene products designed for reuse, not disposable polypropylene products.*
	Minimum Requirements plus one or more of the following:
	• Product is GreenScreen certified
	• Microwave- and dishwasher safe
	• Product has a specific end-user accessibility profile, such as:
	  • Easy to safely grip, hold, or open
	  • Lightweight
	  • Easy to see (high contrast colors)
	  • Non-breakable when dropped
	  • Designed to minimize potential burns (e.g., insulated, secure lid)

Ecolabels to Look For

GreenScreen-certified products are free of melamine, bisphenols, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and other toxic chemicals of concern.

Related Tips

- Consider using a reusable food service ware system—a turnkey service where a vendor provides reusable food service ware, collects it after use, sanitizes it at their facility, and returns it for reuse. A list of service providers can be found on StopWaste's website.
- For office breakrooms, provide microwave- and dishwasher-safe reusable food service ware and identify who will be responsible for cleaning and putting it away.
- Consider establishing a food service ware "library" in your office where employees can check out sets for meetings, events, or personal use (e.g., lunch kits). To prevent breakage, use dividers when storing, transporting, or washing glass and ceramic food service ware.
- For new construction or tenant improvement projects that include a breakroom, consider including elements that support reusable food service ware, such as storage cabinets, sinks, and dishwashers.
- Jurisdictions in Alameda County can use Measure D funds to purchase dishwashers and reusable food service ware.

Benefits

- **Reuse saves money.** Case studies repeatedly show cost savings when switching from disposable food service ware to reusables.
- **Reuse protects our oceans and helps curb plastic pollution.** Eight of the top 10 most commonly found plastic pollution items during International Coastal Cleanup events are food and beverage packaging.
- **Reuse helps prevent climate change.** Over its lifecycle, reusable food service ware generates lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions compared to disposable alternatives.
- **Reuse saves water.** Even taking washing into account, reusable food service ware uses less water over its lifecycle than disposables.

For specific data and example metrics on the benefits listed above, check out Upstream's Reuse Wins report.

PRODUCT REGISTRIES

Find/verify certified products by using the following online certified product registry

- GreenScreen Certified Products

TOXIC CHEMICALS IN REUSABLES

The Minimum Requirements in this guide do not allow the following materials due to toxic chemical concerns:

Melamine-formaldehyde resin (MFR or melamine). The U.S. FDA considers melamine food ware safe only if it's heated below 160 degrees. Microwaves and dishwashers typically exceed that, which means melamine (a possible carcinogen) can leach into food. Melamine is also often used as a binder in fiber-based products, so bamboo reusable foodware is not recommended.

Polycarbonate. This type of plastic often contains bisphenols (e.g., BPA/BPS), which are on California's Prop 65 list of chemicals known to cause reproductive harm.

Styrene-Acrylonitrile Resin (SAN). This type of plastic is on California's Prop 65 list of chemicals known to cause cancer.

Additional Resources

- StopWaste's Reusable Foodware Website, featuring links to success stories, grant opportunities, and more.
- Upstream's Reuse Resources: The Reuse Policy Playbook, Switching to Reuse, and the Reuse Wins report.
- ReThink Disposable in California, a program of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund.
- Check the StopWaste Sustainable Purchasing Website for additional implementation resources such as: compliant product lists, contracting resources, and other support tools.

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