

# Sustainable Event Quick Guide



## Using Reusable Bar-Cups at Outdoor Events

### Introduction

Reusable bar cups at outdoor events, sporting venues and clubs have been commonplace in many European countries for over a decade. In some parts of France and Germany it is even a license condition. In the UK, reusable cups are beginning to be adopted more widely at festivals and events and in major sports venues and arenas. This Quick Guide will help you decide if reusable bar cups could work for your event.



### Why use re-usable cups?

#### Audience experience, reputation and brand

Single-use plastic bar cups are often a significant source of litter for events. This waste has to be cleared up during or after the event, and disposed of; incurring costs. Disposable cups also negatively impact on the audience experience, and have led to some negative, high profile, national press coverage in recent years. By taking disposables out of an event, there are fewer resources used, less litter on the floor, and less waste to manage. The 'psychological tipping point' at which audiences find it unacceptable to drop litter will also improve as the cleanliness of the site improves.

Audiences generally prefer the experience of drinking from more solid re-usable cups compared to disposables, and tend to receive green initiatives positively if delivered competently.

In many cases, events using re-usable cups choose to brand a percentage of their cups, which can extend their brand-reach, and satisfy sponsor requirements. However, this needs to be balanced with re-use (at future events) to realise the environmental benefits.

#### The environmental benefit

The majority of the environmental impact, usually around 80% from any type of cup, occurs because of manufacturing. This includes raw materials, water, energy and long-distance transportation.

Other impacts include local transport, washing and what happens to the cup after it has been used.

Although each event and scenario is different, a study from a Swiss festival, OpenAir St. Gallen, showed that, in their case, a reusable cup is the better environmental option compared to a disposable PET cup after only 2.5 uses<sup>1</sup>.

#### The Bio-Plastic Reality

To the best of the author's knowledge there are currently no facilities in the UK that are recycling or composting Bio or plant based-plastics (e.g. PLA, PHB, PHA etc.). Bio-plastics are therefore only suitable for thermal recovery (incineration) or landfill.

Bio-plastics tend to contaminate both the plastic and compost streams at events and waste processing plants. Despite the widespread view that these 'natural' materials are better, the practical reality is the opposite.

<sup>1</sup> Screening LCA: Comparison of single-use and reusable cups (Open Air St. Gallen 2010), Quantis.

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Single use plastic cups are commonly recycled in the UK, however unlike metals which can be recycled infinitely, plastics lose some of their properties each time they are re-processed, becoming a lower grade of material each time. Some plastics are also ‘down-cycled’ which means that they are made into a lesser grade product. It is also the case that every piece of plastic which has not been burned or recycled still exists in the wider environment because plastic does not decompose. The far-reaching impacts of this can be seen in oceans around the world. Whichever way you look at it, using fewer resources and producing less plastic will benefit the environment.

## The Bottom line

The business case for using re-usable cups varies considerably depending on scale and type of event, and the service provider, but in most cases there can be costs savings and/or revenue gain. The balance depends on:

- The savings made from not purchasing reusable cups
- Reducing waste management costs
- Revenue from deposits on cups which are not returned
- The purchase and service costs of the cups

Savings	Costs	Revenue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purchase of disposable cups</li><li>• Litter-picking staff</li><li>• Reduced volume of waste sent to landfill or recycling</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transport</li><li>• Washing service</li><li>• On-site storage</li><li>• Off-site storage (if branded cups used)</li><li>• Cup branding / printing (if used)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Income from cups sold</li><li>• Retained deposits from cups not returned (deposit system)</li><li>• Sponsor income</li></ul>

More details on costs are shown in the *How It Works* section below.

## How it works

### Deciding how to manage your bar-cups

There are a few things to consider when choosing how to manage re-usable bar-cups at your event.

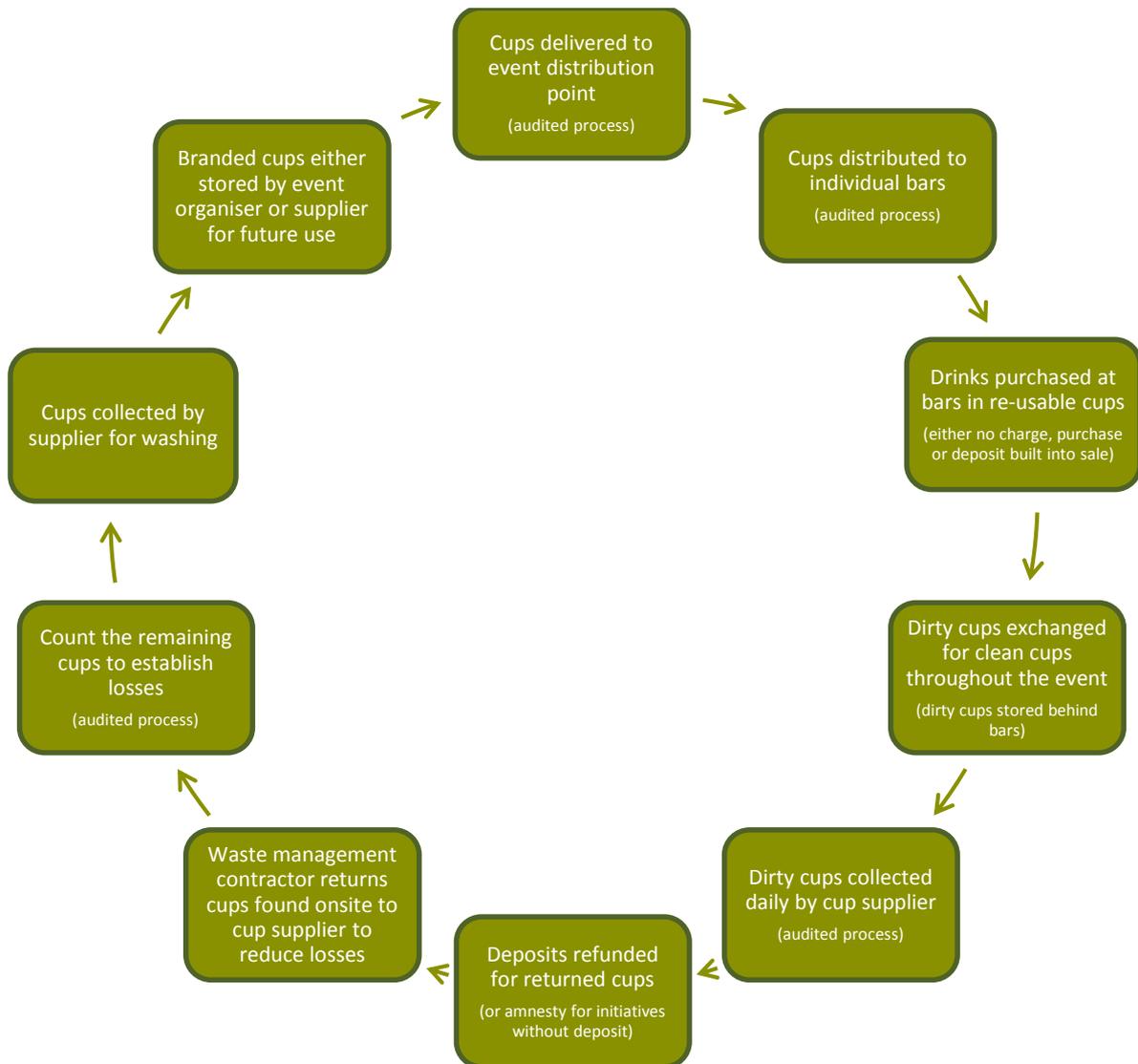
Generally, the aim is to retain a significant percentage of the bar-cups so that they *can* be re-used. This is more easily achieved at events where:

- Multiple drinks are likely to be ordered
- There is a defined boundary for the event – e.g. a fenced site or venue
- there is overall control or management of the bars, or at least the types of bar-cup being used throughout the site

Re-usable cup suppliers offer a range of options including the provision of generic or branded bar-cups, washing the cups on or off site daily, or for smaller events, washing all cups after the event in bulk.

The following diagram illustrates an example of the steps that may be included when implementing a re-usable cup system.

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## Key Considerations

### Buy or rent cups?

- Most event organisers choose a 'service' model with their supplier; renting cups as part of a contract which includes washing.
- Other options include buying a stock of generic or branded cups, to service multiple events, or for one event as part of a multi-year deal.
- The decision to buy cups, rather than rent, usually depends on number of events that the cups will be used at, and/or the confidence that you will be using them for more than one year.
- Financial savings will be increased and environmental impacts will be reduced the more times each cup is used compared to disposable options.

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## Generic or branded cups?

- Event organisers may choose to pay for a percentage of the re-useable cups to be printed with branding from their event or sponsors.
- It is often the case that the cup supplier will manage and wash the branded stock on an event's behalf along with generic rented cups.
- The balance between the number of branded and generic cups is an important consideration for both the financial and environmental benefits.
- Branded cups are more likely to be kept as souvenirs by visitors than the generic stock. This will mean that more plastic is produced and thus increase the environmental impact. A carefully managed deposit system will reduce losses.

## Free to user, purchase, or deposit?

- The decision of how to manage the cups on-site is crucial from a financial and environmental perspective.
- Cups can be provided to audiences for free if there is confidence they can be retained, for example within a stadium with collection points on exit.
- Most cup systems are based on a cup deposit, which encourages users to return cups so that they can be re-used.
- Charging a deposit also ensures that for cups which are not returned, the costs can be recovered for the purchase of each cup.
- Buyers will pay a deposit on their first cup, and then exchange dirty cups for clean ones each time they buy a drink. When they no longer wish to purchase another drink, the deposit is normally returned at the bar or at another location, such as an exit point.
- Another option is to charge a non-refundable deposit, or a 'levy'. This encourages the return of cups each time the user wants to purchase another drink. This system will increase revenue for the organiser but it will lead to more lost cups because there is no incentive to return them after the users last drink has been purchased.
- Some events have successfully implemented an amnesty on exit without offering a financial incentive.
- It may be worth considering providing all festival-goers with a re-usable cup on entry which is included in their ticket price, and only charge for additional cups at the bar, effectively only charging for lost cups.

## How much deposit should be charged?

- If an event chooses to charge a cup deposit, it should reflect the audience demographic i.e. effectively encourage cups to be returned.
- A £1 or £2 deposit is common amongst UK events that have implemented reusable cups initiatives; however, organisers of events with more affluent visitors may consider charging more.

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## Wash on or off-site?

- Larger events may choose to set up in-house washing facilities on-site, or invite the cup supplier to do so.
- Most commonly, washing is provided by the supplier off-site, either on a daily basis or all together at the end of the event.
- In the model where cups are all washed at the end, the cup supplier will provide enough cups to accommodate the total number of drinks likely to be sold at the whole event.
- Whilst generic cups may only be used once at your event, they will be used many times throughout the season at other events, which further reduces the environmental impact in comparison to disposables.

## Making it work

There are a few crucial elements to delivering a reusable cups system successfully;

1. **Consistency:** Generally, a reusable cups system will be more successful if all the bars onsite are using the same types of cups with the same system throughout.
2. **The right amount of stock:** Running out of cups is not an option as reverting to disposables may compromise the system. Careful estimation of cup numbers required, with a margin for higher than expected sales is prudent. Having more generic stock should not incur extra costs, as most service models are based on transport, washing fees and losses.
3. **Logistics:** On-site logistics are important. Cups need to be delivered to site, audited, then distributed to each bar. Usually there is a single storage location and a manager. Additional stock may also be required at certain bars. Dirty cups need to be packed into containers at each bar, and then returned to the cup store. It is important to get this right to avoid running out of cups at bars and to have confidence in the numbers lost. Events choose to either have a dedicated member of staff overseeing this operations and/or work with their bar supplier or cup provider to manage this process.
4. **Communication:** This is crucial, and determines whether cup system is effective. Both the staff and the audience need to be clear about how the system works. Advance communications, large visible signage at bars and good communication between bar staff and audience are required. Clearly explaining the environmental benefits of reusable cup systems enhances perception, engagement and increases the percentage of returned cups. In addition to the financial incentives of the system, audiences are also motivated by the idea of experiencing a cleaner festival site.

## Conclusion

Most events are aiming to find the right balance between covering the costs of managing the re-useable cup system, satisfying sponsors, retaining the majority of cups for re-use and minimising losses. Experience suggests that the optimal system is one where a deposit is charged for the first cup used and a small number of branded cups are provided compared to the generic stock; most of which will be retained by the audience. This balances costs and helps to realise the environmental benefits.