



Guide to a Litter-Free Festival

For Cleaner Festivals – Without Plastics or Litter



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 CIRCULAR ECONOMY
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Introduction

This guide provides councils and cities with practical steps to reduce plastic waste and litter at festivals and other large events. It aims to assist organisations in hosting cleaner, more sustainable events, with a clear focus on minimising environmental impact.

Developed within the BALTIPLAST project (*Baltic Approaches to Handling Plastic Pollution under a Circular Economy Context*), the guide draws on the experiences of Keep Sweden Tidy and the City of Västerås in reducing plastic waste and litter during Västerås City Festival 2023–2025.

Our goal is to inspire and support local public authorities by sharing effective strategies and lessons learned. Together, we can move towards cleaner, more sustainable festival environments — not only in Sweden but internationally as well.

The benefits of a plastic- and litter-free festival are numerous. Not only does it save resources and reduce waste management costs, but it also creates a cleaner and more welcoming experience for visitors.



Why a Plastic- and Litter-Free Festival Matters

Large-scale events and festivals are increasingly under scrutiny for their environmental footprint, with recent data highlighting troubling trends in waste generation, the pervasive use of single-use plastics, and their prevalence in litter composition. For instance:

A festival free from plastic waste and litter brings numerous benefits such as reduced environmental impact through less waste polluting nature, lower resource consumption fostering a circular economy, decreased waste management costs enabling resources to be allocated elsewhere and moreover, enhanced visitor experience with cleaner, more attractive surroundings.

- **Increased waste production:** The EU has reported a rise in overall waste volumes, with festivals contributing to this alarming trend.^[1] Notably, the Roskilde Festival has experienced waste volumes increasing by approximately 76 tonnes annually over the last two decades.^[2]
- **Excessive use of single-use plastics:** In Sweden alone, over 1.2 billion single-use plastic cups were sold in 2023^[3], equating to an average of 119 cups per person annually. Single-use items are especially prevalent at festivals, intensifying environmental concerns.
- **Prevalence of single-use items in litter:** In Sweden, research indicates that 90% of litter is composed of single-use items, with plastic waste — such as cigarette butts, candy wrappers, and food packaging — accounting for two-thirds of it.^[4]

90 %
of litter is composed
of single-use items

1. European Environment Agency, Preventing waste in Europe, EEA Report 02/2025

2. Roskilde Festival's Resource & Waste Management Plan 2020-2024

3. Naturvårdsverket, engångsplastmuggar och -matlådor

4. Skräppapporten 2025



A Step-by-Step Approach to Hosting a Litter-Free Festival

Transitioning to a litter-free festival is a gradual process that demands careful planning, collaboration, and commitment from all stakeholders. Based on lessons learned by Keep Sweden Tidy and the City of Västerås, we recommend the following 5 key steps:

1.

Establish a Strong Foundation

Achieving a plastic- and litter-free festival starts with establishing the right conditions within your local authority or city — a crucial first step. Begin by clearly defining your vision and goals and assess existing plans to identify any gaps or areas for additional action. Next, set realistic, achievable targets that allow for gradual progress and sustained momentum. Finally, foster a collaborative environment — success relies on strong partnerships across departments, businesses, and stakeholders.

Recommendations:



- Develop strategic policies (e.g., a plastic action plan) to guide your efforts.
- Plan for gradual decrease in litter and plastic consumption at the Festival and long-term development.
- Allocate resources: Designate funding, staff, and clear responsibilities for driving change. Appoint someone responsible for the transition.
- Engage the stakeholders in the process, make sure they get involved.
- Pilot and evaluate smaller-scale initiatives before scaling up.
- Create a dedicated budget and explore opportunities for cost-sharing or adjusting fees (e.g., with food vendors).

2.

Identify Specific Challenges

Once the conditions are in place for transitioning to a plastic- and litter-free festival, it's essential to develop a solid understanding of the current situation by establishing a clear baseline. This involves identifying and mapping the specific sources of plastic waste and litter throughout the festival. Keep in mind that different zones within the festival grounds often face distinct challenges. Conducting litter assessments in key areas helps determine both the scale and nature of the problem. For example, at the Västerås Cityfestival, the most common items found in the food court area were napkins, foil, and snus. In the City Park, where no food was sold, cigarette butts, snus, and packaging from candy, snacks, and ice cream dominated.^[1]

In addition to measurements, consider using direct observations and stakeholder interviews — with food vendors, exhibitors, and festival-goers — as valuable data-gathering sources. These conversations can reveal hidden issues and opportunities. For instance, banned plastic items like cups and straws may still be in use despite EU regulations. Another common challenge is the distribution of plastic giveaway items such as balloons or earplugs. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of your festival's existing plastic use and litter patterns is key to developing effective, well-targeted interventions.



"Conducting litter assessments in key areas helps determine both the scale and nature of the problem."

Recommendations:



- Engage early with food vendors, exhibitors, and suppliers to understand what products are used and in what quantities.
- Investigate different festival zones to identify specific waste and litter challenges.
- Review the festival's own procurement—are all items necessary, and what type of waste do they generate?
- Measure overall waste and litter generated during the event.
- Use collected litter data to pinpoint the most problematic materials and implement targeted solutions.





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3.

Implement Tailored Measures

With a clearer picture of the current challenges and sources of plastic waste at your festival, the next step is to implement targeted actions to address them. These measures should be tailored to different stakeholder groups, each of which plays a unique role in shaping festival waste patterns.

One key group is food vendors, both temporary and permanent, who often contribute significantly to the distribution of single-use items, especially in contexts where fast service is essential. Many food vendors may not be fully aware of current regulations on banned single-use plastic products or the environmental implications of their use.

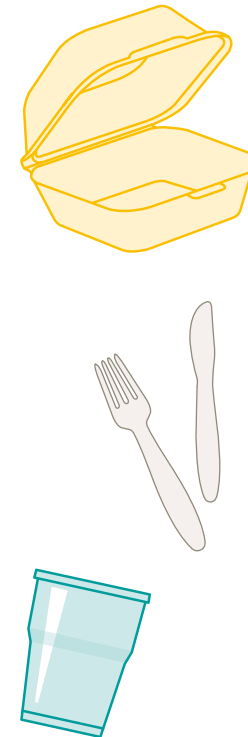
This guide presents recommended actions based on circular economy principles: **reduce**, **reuse**, and **recycle**. Additional strategies — such as **restore**, which involves efforts to repair environmental damage, and **lead by example**, to inspire broader change — can further strengthen your approach and create lasting impact.

Recommendations:



Reduce:

- Clearly communicate with exhibitors, food vendors, and suppliers to remind them that the use of prohibited single-use plastics is not allowed.
- Ban or strongly discourage the distribution of single-use plastics and plastic packaging on festival grounds.
- Conduct on-site inspections during the festival to ensure compliance with your requirements, where permitted by law.
- Discourage unnecessary giveaways — such as balloons, plastic decorations, or other disposable items — that contribute to waste.
- Launch awareness campaigns aimed at reducing littering behaviour among festival visitors.



Reuse:

- Collaborate with food vendors to introduce reusable plates, cutlery, and cups. Studies show that reusable options enhance the dining experience.^[1]
- Partner with organisations offering reusable service solutions. Explore options for carrying out dishwashing locally.

Recycle:

- Implement waste-sorting stations with clear signage.
- Provide proper infrastructure for items eligible for return deposit schemes.

Restore:

- Protect sensitive environments such as waterways by installing physical barriers to prevent litter from spreading.
- Ensure frequent waste collection and cleaning throughout the festival and provide additional waste containers in high-traffic areas to manage increased waste volumes effectively.

Be a Role Model:

- Lead by example by minimizing the use of single-use products in all aspects of festival operations.
- Train festival staff in sustainable practices and ensure they understand and promote the festival's broader environmental goals.



4.

Monitor and Evaluate Progress

This step builds directly upon first: establishing a strong foundation. Strong collaboration with stakeholders such as local authorities, food vendors, and waste management partners is essential to ensure an effective evaluation process.

Regular evaluations are crucial to gaining insights into what strategies are effective and identifying areas that need improvement. By analysing these insights, you can determine which initiatives are worth continuing and which should be reconsidered or abandoned.

A vital aspect of this step is providing transparent and actionable feedback to stakeholders. This not only fosters trust but also empowers all parties to collaboratively refine strategies and drive meaningful change together.

Recommendations:



- Set measurable targets and collect relevant data, such as waste volumes or litter levels.
- Conduct surveys with visitors and exhibitors to gauge perceptions of new initiatives.
- Share outcomes with stakeholders and adjust plans as necessary to maintain progress.

"Regular evaluations are crucial after every festival"



5.

Communicate Achievements and Share Knowledge

Festivals, whether lasting just one day or spanning several days, demand long-term planning and commitment to achieve a transition toward being litter- and plastic-free. The challenges involved are often more complex than they initially appear, making strong cooperation among stakeholders essential for success. Achieving meaningful change takes time, but even small, incremental steps can lead to significant breakthroughs over time. By sharing success stories and lessons learned, your efforts can inspire others and create a ripple effect, amplifying the impact far beyond the boundaries of your festival.

Recommendations



- Share your progress, even small steps, to build momentum and engagement.
- Partner with other local public authorities to exchange ideas and best practices.
- Learn from international success stories to improve your strategies.

Checklist for a Litter-Free Festival



- ☐ Create long-term conditions and establish clear responsibilities.
- ☐ Map specific challenges, litter sources and plastic flows.
- ☐ Implement targeted measures – reduce, reuse, recycle, restore, be a role model.
- ☐ Monitor, evaluate, and adjust strategies as needed.
- ☐ Share progress and learn from others.



BALTIPLAST Achievements

Keep Sweden Tidy and Västerås City partnered from 2023 to 2025 with support from BALTIPLAST Interreg EU to prevent and reduce littering and single-use plastics at the Västerås City Festival. Drawing over 300,000 visitors annually, the festival takes place each June and is organized by the local public authority Visit Västerås in collaboration with local partners.

During the initial phases of the project, several challenges emerged. These included difficulties in balancing municipal resource allocation with broader priorities, as well as the ongoing sale of previously banned plastic items, such as straws and cups. In addition, the festival generated a large volume of plastic giveaways, leading to significant littering. Limited adoption of reusable packaging for food and drinks, inadequate waste sorting systems, and litter leakage into the Svartå River further contributed to environmental pressures.

To better understand these issues and monitor progress, the project prioritized cross-sector collaboration and data collection, creating a platform for targeted measures to drive meaningful change. In 2023, Keep Sweden Tidy brought together local public authorities, researchers, and festival organizers in a dedicated think tank to discuss the challenges and explore solutions for reducing litter and single-use plastics at festivals.

Additionally, annual litter measurements provided a clear baseline for waste and single-use plastic levels across the festival grounds, forming the foundation for tracking developments over time. The insights gained through the think tank discussions and litter measurements shaped the recommendations in this guide and informed the targeted measures and initiatives implemented during the project.

Some examples of our measures:

- Initiated a dialogue and shared information sheets with food vendors and exhibitors about banned single-use plastic items.
- Conducted regular litter measurements to monitor and evaluate progress.
- Implemented a ban on distributing single-use plastic giveaways.
- Improved waste sorting stations.
- A rotation system for reusable plates in collaboration with Panter. A pilot with a smaller number of food trucks was conducted in 2024, covering 2,800 servings. In 2025, all food trucks were offered to participate, reaching a total of 10,000 servings.
- Launched digital campaigns targeting visitors in the lead up to the festival.
- Conducted a plastics inventory within the festival organisation, leading to greater use of reusable alternatives.
- Hosted litter-picking events to raise awareness.

We conclude that both littering, and the use of single-use plastics have decreased at Västerås City Festival through a combination of targeted measures. Litter measurements revealed an estimated 30% reduction by 2025 compared to the previous year. Further analysis showed a significant 42% decrease in single-use plastic food packaging litter specifically within the food court, where a reusable plate rotation system was actively in use. The system contributed to reduced climate impact and a more enjoyable experience for visitors. The insights and lessons learned from the project have been integrated into this guide's recommendations to support other festival organisers in planning plastic- and litter-free events, ensuring that the project's impact reaches far beyond Västerås.



Västerås City Festival

When: End of June each year

Where: Central Västerås

Visitors 2025: 359 200

Organiser: Visit Västerås and local partners

Festival content:

- Concerts
- Food trucks
- Pride parade
- Market & lotteries
- Activities for all ages

"We scaled up our reusable plate rotation system"

Litter Measurements

Litter measurements are crucial for understanding the extent of plastic waste and litter at festival grounds, identifying key challenges, and evaluating the effectiveness of implemented measures over time. These measurements can be carried out in a variety of ways, depending on the festival's characteristics, the physical layout of the area, and specific conditions. Both extensive surveys and smaller, targeted measurements can be conducted to suit different needs.

Keep Sweden Tidy has extensive experience in conducting litter measurements across diverse environments and can help tailor the right method to each unique setting. We offer an app equipped with various litter measurement protocols, on-site data entry tools, detailed method descriptions, and support in compiling and analysing results.



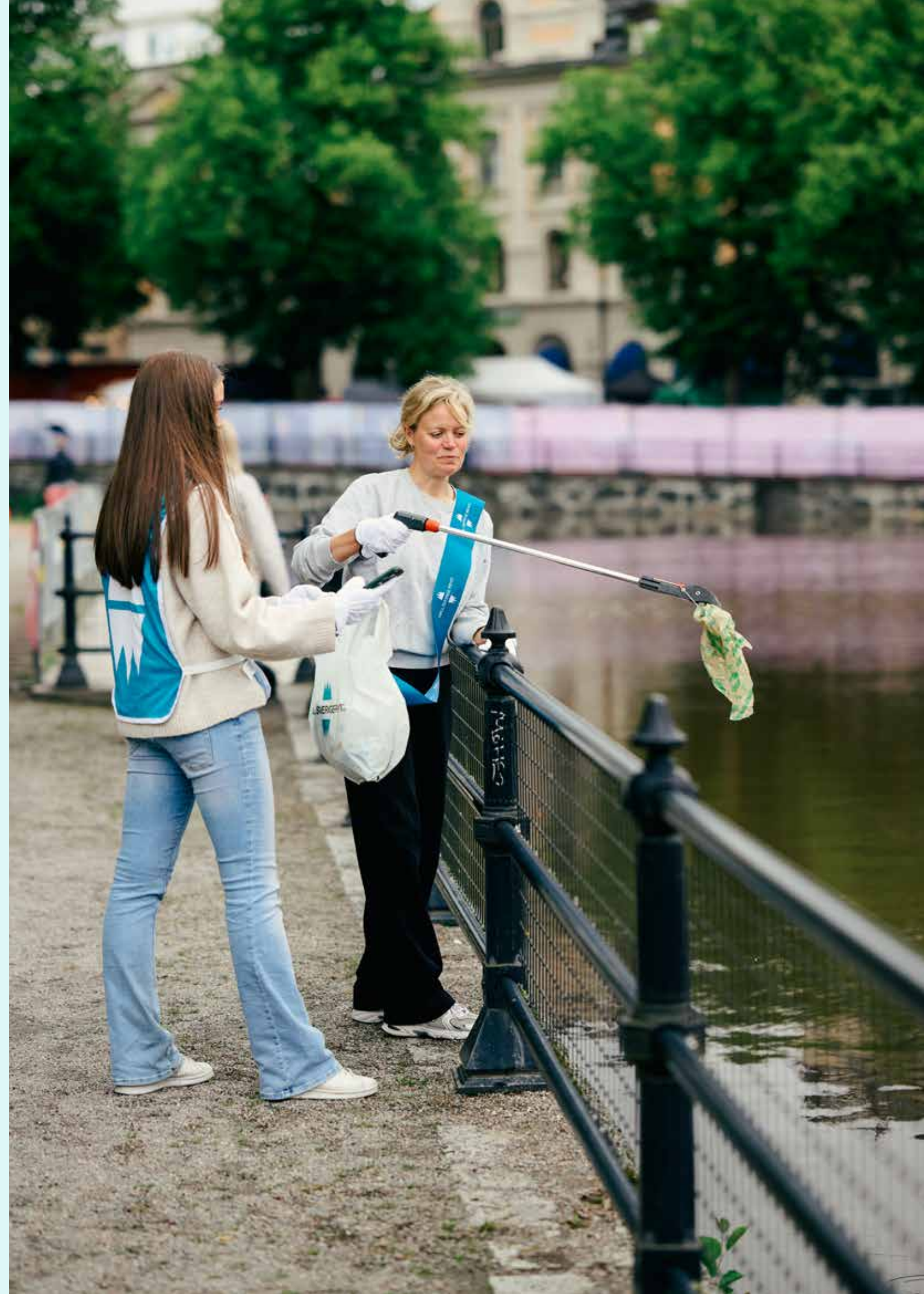
Littering Analysis

People's littering behaviours can vary significantly depending on the place and context, influencing how, where, and what type of litter is discarded.

For example, in a park, individuals may spend more time seated while eating and drinking, leading to the gradual accumulation of waste. In crowded environments, such as the front row of a concert, opportunities to dispose of items like snus, cigarette butts, or candy wrappers may be limited. Meanwhile, outdoor food court areas often generate large amounts of lightweight single-use plastic packaging and napkins, which can be easily blown away on windy days.

The location of littering is also influenced by the placement and design of sales points and exhibitors offering giveaways. Additionally, the strategic placement of litter bins and recycling containers plays a critical role. Are they positioned in high-traffic areas, and do they align with the type of litter being generated?

Conducting a walk-through of the site with these questions in mind can provide valuable insights and inspire effective measures to reduce—or ideally, prevent—littering altogether. For more information on litter measurements and littering analysis, contact info@hsr.se



What are some examples of legislation impacting the space?

Offer Reusable Cups and Food Containers

Single-use cups and food containers are an environmental concern as they are discarded after just one use, wasting natural resources and contributing to climate change. Often made of a combination of paper and plastic, these items pose a significant problem when plastic litter ends up in nature or the ocean, where it takes a very long time to decompose.

Since 2024, a new Swedish regulation requires all businesses that serve an average of at least 150 drinks in single-use cups or fast food in single-use containers — including food trucks — offer re-usable alternatives to its customers as part of a rotation system. In 2026, this threshold will be halved to 75 items. While vendors are responsible for following the law, festivals and food trucks face specific challenges. Mobile vendors often struggle to implement reusable cup and container systems due to their movement and short-term presence at locations.

Local public authorities can play a vital role by supporting rotation systems for reusable cups and food containers at festival grounds. Several companies offer services to facilitate this, making it easier for vendors to transition to sustainable practices. Public authorities, responsible for overseeing compliance, must ensure the conditions are in place to support vendors in meeting these requirements.

"Single-use cups and food containers are often made of a combination of paper and plastic"



Plastic Cups Are Prohibited

Single-use cups that contain more than 15 per cent plastic have been prohibited from 1 January 2024 as part of the EU's Single-Use Plastics Directive.

Sorting Waste On-site

Since 1 January 2024, organisers of public outdoor events in Sweden are required to provide visitors with the opportunity to sort their packaging waste. For festivals, this means ensuring that waste sorting is possible throughout the festival area. Simply providing general litter bins is not enough; dedicated containers for materials such as paper, plastic, glass, and metal — or other packaging materials generated at the event — must be available.



Confetti

At festivals, confetti is often used during artists' performances; however, since 30 April 2022, the use of plastic confetti outdoors has been completely prohibited in Sweden. This ban is part of the EU's Single-Use Plastics Directive aimed at reducing single-use plastic littering. According to a recent Novus survey commissioned by Keep Sweden Tidy, only one in ten Swedes is aware of the ban, while nearly nine out of ten support a complete ban on the sale of plastic confetti.



This guide has been developed within BALTIPLAST,
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Want to know more?
Feel free to contact us at Keep Sweden Tidy: info@hsr.se

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