Virginia Green™

Sustainable Event Guide

www.virginiagreen.net

Virginia Green Travel Alliance

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DEQ Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

VIRGINIA RESTAURANT · LODGING · TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

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Sustainable Event Guide: Green Festivals, Conferences & Meetings

The Virginia Green program provides guidance, resources and incentives to tourism-related businesses that want to decrease the environmental impacts of their operations. The Virginia Green Certification program provides recognition opportunities to businesses that have implemented sustainable practices in various core areas of environmental commitment. The program is run in partnership with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Tourism Corporation, and the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association.

Virginia Green applications and additional resources can be found at www.VirginiaGreen.net. Festival, conferences, meetings and other events can be recognized as Certified Virginia Green Travel Events if they meet certain requirements.

Significant Environmental Impacts

Festivals, conferences, meetings and other events are important contributors to regional and statewide tourism. However, they can also result in significant environmental impacts from the waste generated, the amount of materials used, transportation to and from the event, and the energy and water consumed during the event. For an environmentally-responsible organization, a wasteful festival, conference or meeting can be embarrassing; and it can literally have a negative impact on an otherwise positive experience for attendees. Conversely, thoughtfully-planned "green events" will clearly communicate to participants that the organizers are committed to minimizing the event's environmental impacts.

Hosting a green event does not mean additional incurred costs – it simply requires a change in mindset and some thoughtful, up-front planning. Facilities and venues that are prepared to host green conferences, meetings and events will make the event organizer's job that much easier; and hopefully, that facility will be rewarded with repeat business and referrals. Virginia Green Certified conference centers, hotels, parks and other venues would be the natural choice for hosting green conferences, meetings and events!

Planning

Executing a sustainable event involves all aspects of event operations. Establishing a “Green Team” is certainly a good thing to do to develop an effective plan; but ideally “being green” is something that is embraced at all levels of the operational team for your event.

- ✓ **Green Policy Statement.**
  Develop a policy statement or other organizational document that states goals for implementing a sustainable event.

- ✓ **Choose a Green Certified Venue.**
  Virginia Green Certified partners have all made commitments to host green events and they should be ready to accommodate all of your wishes to host a green event.

- ✓ **How is it going to happen?**
  Create a list of sustainable tasks that includes everything you would like to implement for your event. This document provides specific information that you can use when developing that list of green practices for your event.

- ✓ **Reporting & Review.**
  Summarize and document your efforts, discuss the good and bad, brainstorm and set goals to improve for the next event.

How might your event and its activities impact the surrounding environment?
Which sustainability efforts will gain maximum results?
What components of your event do you have control over and who are other stakeholders?

Recycling

Recycling is the cornerstone of a green event because it will be the most tangible and visible activity for attendees. If you do not have an effective and highly visible recycling program in place, other green practices will not won't matter to attendees. Again, choosing to have your event at a Virginia Green Certified venue greatly facilitates this task as recycling should already be fully implemented. If your venue does not already have a strong recycling program, planning for your green event will be more difficult. Even if your venue does have recycling in place, your planning team should fully evaluate the current program and whether or not it meets your expectations for "how green" you want your event to be.

TIP: Adding recycling to your event should not increase disposal costs. Remember, it is the same amount of material – and hauling recycling is typically less expensive than trash disposal.

Set a Recycling & Landfill Diversion Goal

- ✓ What is a reasonable recycling rate for a green event? This depends on variables such as the venue itself, local recycling opportunities and overall community support.
- ✓ First step will be to determine a method for how this rate will be determined.
- ✓ Real weights of trash and recycling could be determined in partnership with your haulers and operational team.
- ✓ Actual scales can be used for smaller events to record weights after the event. Estimates can be made on reasonable by assumptions, standards and observations.
- ✓ Track results year-after-year and use this data to help determine goals for subsequent events.
- ✓ Summarize all landfill diversion and green event successes.

Estimate of Trash & Recycling Weights

The table below shows a few standard weight volume conversions for different material types. However, it may be more accurate to weigh a couple of times at your event(s) to establish norms for containers that are full, half-full, etc. The table also shows an "adjusted event" column based upon typical events in Richmond, VA.

Standards Used for Estimating Trash and Recycling.

Weight Estimates (based on 96-gallon totes / 0.5 cubic yards.)	EPA standard*	Adjusted event estimate	Notes
Trash	**125 lbs**	**60 lbs**	**Event trash is significantly lighter once food wastes not included.**
Mixed Recyclables (bottles, cans, cardboard, glass, plastic)	**131 lbs**	**45 lbs**	**Very minimal amount of glass in festival recycling.**
Food/Disposables Collected for Composting	**198 lbs**	**80 lbs**	**Abundance of compostables disposables are not heavy.**

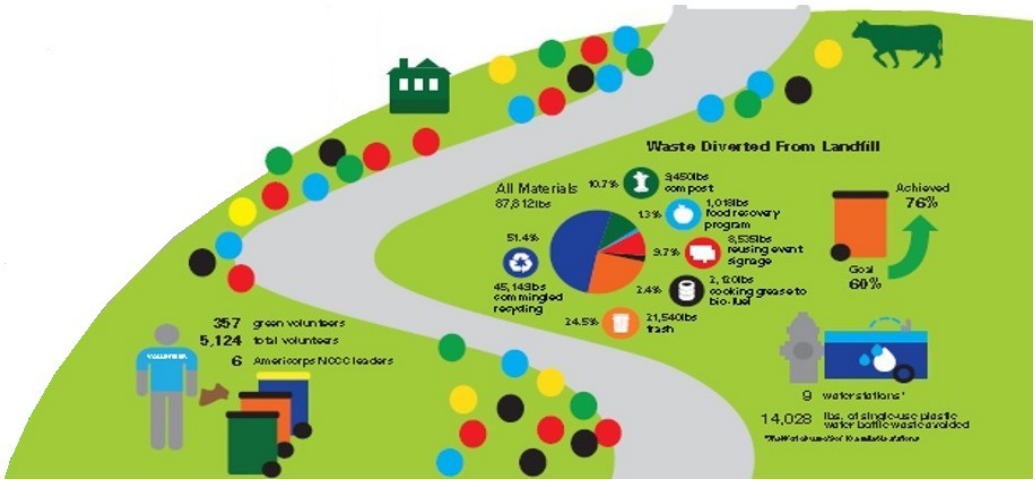
*Reference: https://www.epa.gov/smm/volume-weight-conversion-factors-solid-waste

The weights from all recycling and waste diversion efforts can be included and considered when calculating the Recycling Rate for events.

Total and Diverted Waste for the 2017 Riverrock Festival.

	2016	2017	Change
Trash Sent to Landfill	**2415 lbs**	**2100 lbs**	**-13%**
Mixed Recyclables (bottles, cans, cardboard, glass, plastic)	**1873 lbs**	**2000 lbs**	**+7%**
Food/Disposables Collected for Composting	**320 lbs**	**950 lbs**	**+197%**
Waste avoided thru "tap wine" (1430 bottles X 1.1 lbs)	**1,195 lbs**	**1,573 lbs**	**+31%**
Total Materials Recycled / Avoided	**3,453 lbs**	**4,523 lbs**	**+31%**
Total Materials Managed	**5,868 lbs**	**6,623 lbs**	**+13%**
Recycling / Landfill Diversion Rate	**59%**	**68%**	**+9%**

2015 UCI Road World Championships



Recycling Containers & Signage

Co-Locate.
Containers should be co-located. Always place recycling cans next to a trash can. A recycling can alone become a trash can.

Uniform Signage.
Uniform signage should include labels on what is and is not recyclable at the event. You might even consider the types of disposables that you anticipate having and include them on the signage. Include pictures!

Close the Lid!
Containers should ideally have lids that close with the recycling instructions on the lids.

Educate at the Entrance.
Larger-scale signs and banners near entranceways help to educate attendees prior to using the containers.

Create Eco-Stations.
"Eco-Station" flags are an effective way to raise awareness and indicate the high level of commitment to sustainability at a given event.

Where are the Eco-Stations?
Event website and maps should include information about green efforts including recycling.

Plastic Liners.
In general, use clear liners for trash and recycling. Never use black bags for recycling as workers at material recovery facilities (MRFs) assume that black bags are for trash and will not open them if they cannot see recyclables. Many MRFs do not accept materials in plastic liners, so be sure to discuss this issue with your hauler in advance.

The City of Richmond now offers specially labelled event containers as part of the event permit process. This allows for consistent messaging and greatly facilitates the greening of events for event planners.

How To Make It Happen?

If you have the absolute best signage in place and your event is relatively small; perhaps the recycling will not become too contaminated. For every other event, a designated operational team is needed to monitor, maintain containers, and make sure that the materials end up in the proper hauling dumpsters or other containers. Event planners should designate "green team leaders" and involve operational staff in the development of a plan to work together effectively.

What Can We Recycle?

The general expectation in most urban areas is that mixed, single-stream recycling would provide for the comprehensive recycling of glass, plastic bottles, aluminum, paper and cardboard. In more rural areas, certain types of recyclables may need to be collected separately; and it may not be feasible to recycle certain items at all. If you cannot recycle any of these items, it should be specified on signs and your organization should be able to explain why any of these items are not being recycled.

What else can we recycle? Depending upon your venue, you may want to account for:

✓ Pallets.
Require vendors to remove these during or after deliveries or arrange for pallet-refurbisher to pick them up.

✓ Cooking Grease.
If you have food vendors, they will most likely have waste cooking grease. Provide for central collection.

✓ Signs & Banners.
Ideally, event planners should strive to create signage that is reusable at other events. Many sign companies will recycle banners and signs, and there may be other groups that can reuse the materials or help find recycling opportunities. Incidentally, coroplast signs are made from #2 plastic and many recycling vendors will accept this material if it is not "co-mingled" with other materials.

Other Items:

Food Waste & Compostables.
This is a recycling undertaking that deserves its own section (see next page).

Oyster Shells.
If oysters are served, the Virginia Oyster Shell Recycling Program would love to help retrieve the shells which are used to replenish oyster reefs in the Chesapeake Bay. bit.ly/2tAFTgM

Electronics.
Your event could include an electronics waste collection for attendees. DEQ has provided a listing of e-waste vendors currently providing electronics collection services. bit.ly/2LpoxPJ

Clothing.
Many running/athletic events generate hundreds of pounds of waste clothing that can be collected and donated to local social service operations.

Plastic Bags / Wraps.
Dry plastic wrap from set-up and other bags are readily recyclable through many retail and grocery stores. You can find drop off locations in your area on www.plasticfilmrecycling.org. Please note that, typically, waste bags from ice are not recyclable because of moisture content. Plastic bags should not be co-mingled in recycling containers.

Construction Debris.
Debris from set-up etc. can be recycled through companies that are "LEED-approved", like W.M. Jordan, S.B. Ballard, HITT Contracting, etc.

Food Waste & Compostables

For any event that provides food services or has vendors, a significant portion of the waste generated will be from waste food and the disposables used to serve it. Providing for the collection of these items in addition to other recyclables can result in a dramatic increase in the landfill diversion rate. However, collection of food waste and disposables can be very challenging and involves careful planning and consideration of many logistics such as:

- ✓ Finding a service provider that will compost these materials.
- ✓ Determining what types of materials can be composted by that handler.
- ✓ Providing for additional containers and signage that must be co-located with trash and recycling containers.

For events with food vendors:

- ✓ Require that vendors only use compostable cups, plates, bowls and utensils.
- ✓ Some events include the purchase of disposables as part of the vendor fee to ensure that no other items are used.

For venues with kitchens and real dishes:

- ✓ Need to coordinate with staff to collect food wastes during food prep and "scrape" post-consumer food wastes into a different back-of-house container.

In general, items contaiminated with food cannot by recycled, unless they are being composted.

What is Compostable?

This depends upon the requirements of the hauler and where the material is going. Ideally, it is going to a facility that accepts all waste foods including meats, cheese, etc.

- ✓ All paper napkins, paper towels and some paper plates are generally compostable.
- ✓ All cardboard is compostable, so yes, pizza boxes with grease are compostable.
- ✓ Beverage containers must clearly have an indication that it is "compostable" or "PLA" materials made from corn / vegetable materials. Most hot-beverage cups, even paper cups, have a plastic coating that makes them unsuitable for composting or recycling unless they are labelled otherwise.
- ✓ Some utensils may contain misleading labels such as "made from recycled materials". It must say "compostable".
- ✓ Other random items: wax paper / liners are compostable and straws made with polylatic acid or "corn plastic"

Waste Reduction

In addition to recycling, there are many ways to minimize waste from events through thoughtful planning. Similar to choosing a Virginia Green Certified venue, working with green-minded food and other vendors can greatly facilitate cooperation.

- ✓ Provide non-bleached napkins.
- ✓ Provision of bulk water dispensers in lieu of single-use bottles.
- ✓ Provide condiments in bulk to reduce packaging wastes that fouls up recycling and compost collection efforts.
- ✓ Ask vendors to minimize or eliminate use of utensils and small plastic containers for side dishes and condiments.

- ✓ Beverage Cup Reuse
  - Many distributor representatives claim that cups cannot be refilled due to health concerns. Virginia Department of Health staff confirms that the refilling of beverage containers is allowed as long as measures are taken to ensure that it is a contamination-free process. When refilling cups, simply ask pourers to make sure that they do not touch the tap while refilling, just as they should be doing when filling any beverage.
  (Reference: 12VAC5-421-600)
  - Provide for the purchase of a reusable beverage container
  - Provide event-branded, reusable cups.
  - Actively encourage beer / wine vendors and consumers to reuse all cups and to not "pre-fill" beverages. This may take concerted effort and encouragement by operations staff.
  - Post signs that encourage cup reuse at beer trucks, etc.

- ✓ Donate of excess food.
- ✓ Provide sustainable, organic and/or local food offerings
- ✓ Eliminate the use of straws whenever possible.

TIP: Tap Wine.
Certainly you will want to recycle any wine bottles from your event. But many events are now serving wine kegs, eliminating the glass althogether. And the eliminated weight can be included when calculating the event's landfill diversion rate.

Ideas for Minimizing the Impact of Disposables

- ✓ Create a requirement that NO POLYSTYRENE disposable items can be used by any vendors.
- ✓ Educate vendors on recycling and composting activities in place for the event.
- ✓ Require vendors to purchase or provide only compostables / items that are readily recyclable.
- ✓ Provide for recycling and trash co-located with all food vendors so that they can participate in ongoing recycling and waste reduction efforts.

Other Sustainability Opportunities

✓ Prevent Cigarette Litter!

• Provide for signage and cigarette butt collection urns in designated locations.

• Partnering with Keep Virginia Beautiful to promote litter prevention at the event and/or pass out "pocket-ashtrays" to discourage littering.

✓ Do not allow Balloons & Other Airborne Releases.

These are popular at many weddings and other events but cause contamination of local waterways.
See the "Joyful Send-off" campaign which offers alternative ideas to this practice. www.joyfulsendoff.org

✓ Portable Restrooms.

• Specify to local providers that the cleaning solutions used should
contain no butyl, glycol, toxic chemicals, or other hazardous pollutants.

• Toilet tissue should be 100% recycled content and chlorine-free.

• If paper-towels are provided at hand-washing stations, these can be collected and composted if the event is collecting compostables. Paper towels are not suitable for

Green Team Volunteers

Volunteers are essential to the success of a green event, but it is not as simple as getting a few people to sign up.

Recruitment.

There are various ways to encourage people to volunteer for your green team. On-line sign-ups, promotions, and partnerships with other organizations can be effective

• One method is to create a community-level Green Team Volunteer database that encourages interested volunteers and notifies them about green team volunteer opportunities throughout their region. Participants receive orientation and training before events. In the case of the RVA Green Team Volunteer Network, training videos were made available online.

Training & Information.

• Volunteers like to know what they're getting into, what perks they might get, where they park, etc beforehand.

• Green Team Leaders. Designate trained volunteer leaders to train on-site and manage the volunteers. In reality, it is typically necessary to have some paid green team leaders in place to make sure that shifts are covered, volunteers are well-instructed and problems can be dealt with as they arise.

What Do Green Team Volunteers Do?

• Help set up eco-stations and banners, move containers, etc.

• Monitor eco-stations by inspecting containers and using pickers to make sure that materials go into the right containers.

• Help educate event attendees about what goes in each bin.

• Change liners when needed so that they do not overflow.

Green Team
Cheat Sheet

Greenify eco-stations in your section!
Remove recycling from trash and trash from recycling.
Change liners if more than half full.
Use magic green tape on Recycling!
Beer Cups are recyclable & can be reused.
All food & paper can be composted.
Pick up materials on the ground
Help people use the containers correctly & **talk** to them about what you are doing
Drink water and take a break if you get hot
Check out at end of shift and return your pickers to the Green Team Volunteer Tent
Report any problems: Tom-986-9119; Amanda 307-4463.
Have fun while helping the environment!

Other Points & Pointers.

• Provide branded Green Team t-shirts to demonstrate commitment to event attendees.

• Having Green Team Volunteers working clearly demonstrates the commitment that the event planners have made to be a sustainable event.

• Green Team Volunteers are almost always thanked many times over when working by attendees.

• The Green Team "Eco-Rotation". Rather than having green team volunteers "stationed" at 1 eco-station, another effective method is to have volunteers walk from station to station, fixing each station as they go. This allows for more visible coverage and keeps it interesting for volunteers as they get to see all areas and offerings of an event.

Working with Operations Staff

For most events, green team volunteers are not involved in the work of transporting full bags to dumpsters, etc. Venue staff, city workers or other event management staff are typically responsible for transporting materials to central dumpsters and for site clean-up and logistics at the end of the event. Therefore, it is very important to have a firm understanding of division of labor and overall sustainability-focused goals. Describe beforehand how volunteers and staff will work together to these achieve goal.

- ✓ Big Trash and Recycling Signs on Central Dumpsters.
  This is another good way to ensure that the operational team knows where to put material.

- ✓ Handling of Compost.
  • Changing compostable liners is not usually a viable option because they are not as durable as plastic liners.
  • Switching out full containers for empty containers is typically preferable method.

- ✓ RVA Green Team Volunteers uses a "magic green tape" system where the volunteers and operations staff place bright green duct tape on the top of full liners of recycling. This makes sure the operations team knows where to take the material when they have picked up and are transporting to central collection areas.

Water Conservation

Use of water varies depending upon the size and type of the event, as well as whether it is using a facility or is primarily an outdoor festival. Regardless, there are opportunities to reduce these uses and impacts in conjunction with your organization's efforts be to host a green event.

Many green practices may already be in place if you choose a venue that is green-certified and already has measures in place such as:

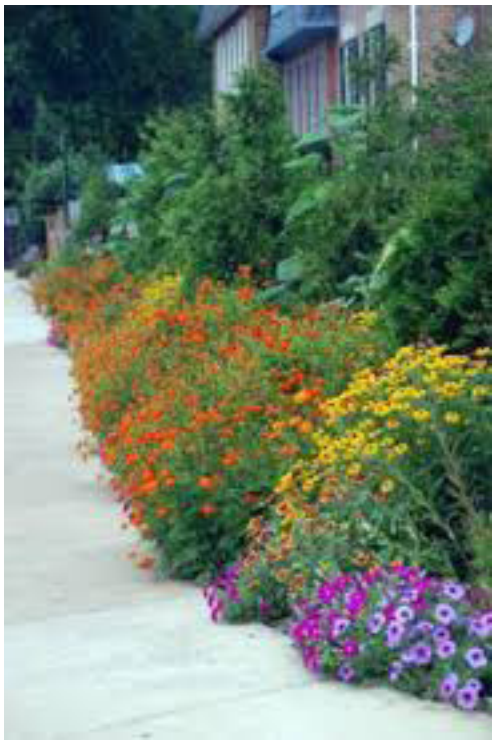
- ✓ Low-flow toilets, showerheads and faucets.
- ✓ Water-saving kitchen appliances and building systems.
- ✓ Rain harvesting techniques such as cisterns and rain barrels.
- ✓ Native species and drought tolerant landscaping to avoid the need for irrigation.
- ✓ Filtered water encourages the use of pitchers and other bulk-water opportunities.

Event planners can take credit for these and other water-saving measures when holding events at Virginia Green Certified facilities.

At the event:

• Providing drinking water in bulk rather than individual plastic water bottles is primarily as waste reduction factor.

• Wash-down water and water for clean-up is a factor that should be considered in order to avoid erosion of soils and to avoid contamination of nearby water sources.



Energy & Transportation

Use of energy at events varies depending on the size and type of the event, as well as whether it is using a facility or is primarily an outside festival. Regardless, energy use can be significant. Oftentimes, transportation is a larger factor from a fuel and emissions standpoint. However, there are lots of opportunities to reduce these uses and impacts in conjunction with your organization's efforts to host a green event.

Many green practices may already be in place if you choose a venue that is Virginia Green Certified and already has measures in place such as:

- ✓ Energy-efficient facilities with green practices already in place such as LED lighting, energy efficient HVAC systems, insulation and Energy-Star-rated appliances that reduce energy use overall.
- ✓ Facility that is near public transit hubs and reduces trip mileage.
- ✓ Venues with electric vehicle charging stations, solar lighting and other green offerings enhance green event efforts with no extra planning.

Transportation

- ✓ Encourage mass transit options:
  - Inform attendees about mass transit locations and options
  - Encourage carpooling through incentives for parking.
- ✓ Encourage Electric Vehicles & Hybrids through preferred parking
- ✓ Provide shuttles from central hub parking areas.
- ✓ Provide Bike Valet/Bike Racks for the event.
- ✓ For conferences and events, estimate the methods and miles travelled by participants to determine the environmental impacts of travel to the event.

Green Power Generation & Use

✓ Solar lighting and other solar applications to reduce energy usage.
- Solar-powered phone charging stations is visible commitment to renewable energy solutions. Many local power companies have mobile stations or you can rent from the Go Charge Network.

✓ Provide electric hook-ups when possible versus gas generators which are much less efficient and create significant noise and air emissions.

✓ Use biodiesel generators if you must use generators for power.
- Temp-Power Rentals offer biodiesel generators for rent or purchase https://www.temp-power.net/

✓ Pedal-power exhibits are now an option at various events to power certain functions.
- Pedal-powered charging stations can provide stress-relief and a way to be active for events that involve a lot of sitting and standing

✓ Greenhouse Gases and Green Power. If you are able to determine the greenhouse gas emissions from your event, you may wish to offset or completely negate these impacts.

- You can calculate / estimate the energy used by your venue as well as the emissions that result from transportation to your event. Examples of calculators are:
    - Carbon Fund (carbonfund.org/business-calculator/)
    - EPA Carbon Footprint Calculator (www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator/)
    - BEF Event Impact Calculator (store.b-e-f.org/event-calculator/)

- Energy Credits/Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) can be purchased to offset the environmental impacts of events and general business operations. RECs support renewable energy technologies such as solar, wind, geothermal and other projects. The costs associated with the REC offset the higher costs of producing this energy versus traditional combustion methods.

- When RECs are purchased or other green power alternatives are supported, the event can claim that it is a “zero greenhouse gas” event or that a portion of those emissions have been offset.

Communication & Participant Engagement

As mentioned in the section on containers and signage, the provision of instructional signage is critical to the success of your recycling efforts. It is also important to educate attendees about all of the sustainable efforts in place for your event.

Event Website

- ✓ Include a page on your website explaining or listing green practices in place for your event.
- ✓ Register as a certified Virginia Green Travel Event, use the Virginia Green logo, and include a link to Virginia Green certification listing and event information.
- ✓ Use recycling logos or the Virginia Green logo on event maps to indicate eco-stations.
- ✓ Use electronic registration for events to reduce paper.

Banners & Signs

- ✓ Include a banner listing all sustainable practices in place at the event entrances or at registration.
- ✓ Include information about your Virginia Green Certification. (Virginia Green Event banners are available for events)

Social Media

- ✓ Include messages and pictures about green practices, green volunteers and post event results.

Involve Sustainable Organizations & Projects

If your event is visibly making an effort to minimize its environmental efforts, environmental organizations will want to support, be involved and perhaps even want to help sponsor your event. Ideas include:

- ✓ Involving environmental organizations on the event planning committee.
- ✓ Partnering for a litter clean-up, tree planting or other type of engagement before or during the event.
- ✓ Working with community groups and partners to encourage and facilitate sustainable events throughout the community. Projects might include:
  - Creating uniform recycling signage for events.
  - Providing for branded event containers and signage.
  - Creating a “green team volunteer network” of sorts to help support green events.
  - Promoting the greening of event locally through the local tourism office / convention & visitors bureau.
- ✓ Offering free or discounted exhibit space to environmentally-focused organizations.
- ✓ Offering a green event sponsor designation for companies that might want to help pay for any additional costs associated with the greening of the event.

Please Certify Your Event as a Virginia Green Travel Event!

The application to be recognized as a Virginia Green Travel Event is at www.virginiagreen.net/ready-for-certification/.
Certified events will be jointly promoted by the Virginia Green Travel Alliance through social media and by the Virginia Tourism Corporation on their green events calendar at www.VirginiaGreenTravel.org.

For information on Virginia Green and Green Festivals, Conferences & Events, go to the Virginia Green at www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/PollutionPrevention/VirginiaGreen.aspx.
Or you can learn more on the Virginia Green marketing website at www.VirginiaGreenTravel.org.