

RBC GranFondo 2025: Zero Waste Report and Future Recommendations



2025 Zero Waste Highlights

- **Record diversion:** 90.7% of all material, including over 1,083 kg of edible surplus food, was kept out of landfill, surpassing the 90% “Zero Waste” threshold.
- **Growing scale:** Total material captured rose to 2,135 kg, up from 1,650 kg in 2022, underscoring the need to focus on absolute waste reduction next year.
- **Surplus-food recovery success:** Volunteers rescued more than a metric tonne of unopened food for the Whistler Community Services Society Food Bank.
- **Strong vendor alignment:** Most food vendors used recyclable or BPI-certified compostable serviceware, simplifying sorting and boosting diversion rates.
- **Engaged on-site team:** Zero Waste Heroes and aid-station volunteers provided real-time guidance to riders, spectators, and vendors, ensuring clean, uncontaminated streams.

Suggested goals for 2026:

- Maintain >90% diversion rate, and reduce total material generated, with a particular focus on surplus food (on-course refreshments) and leftover prepared meals (VIP & Whistler Cooks).



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Introduction

Since 1989, AWARE has worked to educate and mobilize the Whistler community on responsible waste management. Our Zero Waste Heroes Program, created in partnership with the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW), supports large events in meeting the ambitious targets of the RMOW Zero Waste Action Plan, which include:

- 80% reduction in waste (by weight and volume) from 2019 levels by 2030
- Per-capita waste generation below 350 kg per year by 2025
- Zero contamination across all streams by 2030
- 95% diversion of organic waste by 2030

To achieve official “Zero Waste” status, events must divert at least 90% of their total material from landfill. The GranFondo provides a high-profile opportunity to demonstrate how these municipal targets can be met in a large-scale, public setting.

The Zero Waste Heroes Program provides:

- **Pre-event support:** guidance on procurement and materials to reduce waste at the source.
- **Live event support:** trained staff manage zero-waste stations and educate attendees.
- **Post-event reporting:** tracking, analysis, and recommendations to drive continual improvement.

RBC GranFondo - Olympic Plaza & Lot 4, Whistler

September 6th, 2025

The RBC GranFondo Whistler is one of North America’s premier mass-participation cycling events, drawing thousands of riders and spectators each September. Participants tackle a 122 km route from Vancouver to Whistler along the scenic Sea to Sky Highway, enjoying fully closed lanes, breathtaking mountain views, and professionally supported aid stations. The event is celebrated for its challenging, picturesque course and the lively finish-line festival in Whistler Village, where live music, local food vendors, and community activities welcome riders and supporters.

To maximize waste diversion on the course at the aid stations and the celebrations in Whistler, AWARE deployed six Zero Waste stations at Olympic Plaza and two at Lot 4, engaging more than 2,400 event-goers throughout the day. Zero Waste Heroes provided real-time guidance on sorting and waste prevention, answering hundreds of questions about recycling, composting, and local disposal options. Aid-station captains and volunteers were also trained in diversion best practices ahead of the day, ensuring consistent messaging and hands-on education that extended well beyond the event itself.



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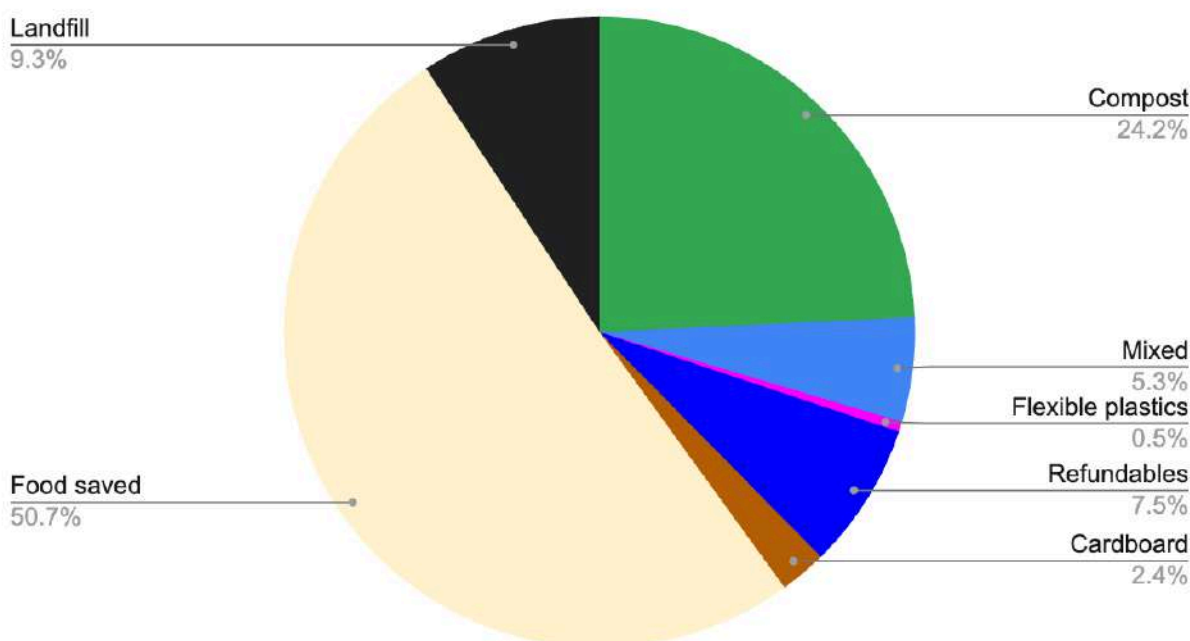
During this year's event, **2,135.62 kg** of waste and surplus food was generated, with **1,937.76 kg (90.73 %)** successfully diverted from landfill. The following breakdown details the composition of the materials captured.

Waste results

The table below outlines the weight and composition of each waste stream, including key examples of what was captured.

Waste Streams	2025 Weight (kg)	2025 Proportion (%)	Notes
Organics	517.84	24.2%	Compostable serveware, uneaten food, and napkins
Beverage Containers/Bottles & Cans	160.4	7.5%	Drinks consumed on site, glass from VIP bar
Cardboard	51.37	2.4%	Cardboard from vendors & bar
Mixed Containers	114.15	5.3%	Coffee cups, recyclable food containers
Surplus food	1083	50.7%	Unopened, edible surplus food from aid stations - donated to the food bank
Garbage to Landfill	197.86	9.3%	Compostable plastics, packaging from outside food vendors, unrecyclable items
Flexible plastics	11	0.5%	Plastic packaging from vendors and the medals
Total Waste and Surplus Generated	2135.62	100%	Captured at AWARE-staffed stations and at the on-course aid stations
Total Diverted from Landfill	1937.76	90.73%	Includes all organics, recycling, surplus food donated, and refundables.

Waste and surplus composition: RBC GranFondo, 2025



Observations

The waste profile of the GranFondo reflected the event's rider-support focus, with the majority of materials coming from food and beverage service and packaging from event operations. The largest streams were organics, followed by mixed containers and cardboard, generated from rider aid stations, vendor serviceware, and finish-line festivities. Smaller but notable streams included flexible plastics and recyclable food containers. Landfill waste consisted primarily of unrecyclable or non-compostable packaging brought in by spectators from outside vendors.

A notable share of compostable waste originated from VIP catering, including entire trays of cooked food being thrown away at the end of the event. Although food-safety rules can restrict redistribution, refining preparation schedules and portioning could minimize surplus and keep more food out of the waste stream. This is discussed further under the recommendations section.

The 2025 RBC GranFondo achieved a 90.73 % diversion rate, continuing a clear trend of improvement from 75.86 % in 2022, 82.51 % in 2023, and 88.74 % in 2024. This figure includes all on-course waste brought to the Plaza as well as surplus food donated to the local Food Bank. The large volume of surplus food recovered and redirected significantly boosted the diversion total. This surplus resulted



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mainly from the sharp reduction in rider participation caused by wildfire smoke, which left more uneaten provisions available for donation.

Waste diverted over the previous years

Year	Waste Collected (kg)	Waste Diverted from Landfill (kg)	% Waste Diverted
2017	NA	NA	88.24%*
2018	NA	NA	88.69%*
2019	NA	NA	81.94%
2022	1650.25	1252.06	75.86%
2023	1662.77	1371.91	82.51%
2024	1850.50	1642.10	88.74%
2025	2135.62	1937.76	90.73%

While we're proud of the year-over-year gains in diversion, the total amount of material collected has risen from 1,650 kg in 2022 to over 2,100 kg in 2025. Our next priority is to reduce the absolute volume of waste, especially surplus and leftover food, so that future events generate less material overall while maintaining high diversion rates.

Key success factors

Key success factors leading to the high diversion rate included:

- **Surplus-food recovery** - Volunteers captured and donated over 1,083 kg of edible food from rider aid stations to the Whistler Community Services Society Food Bank, preventing a significant volume of food from becoming waste, while supporting the local community.
- **Vendor leadership** - Most food vendors used recyclable plastic or certified compostable serveware such as paper plates, BPI-certified compostable coffee cups, and wooden cutlery, which simplified sorting and boosted diversion rates.
- **On-course volunteer excellence** - Aid-station captains and volunteers consistently separated waste at source, ensuring clean streams and minimizing contamination.



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- **Zero-waste station guidance** - Trained Zero Waste Heroes on hand to support riders, spectators, and vendors in real time, helping them sort materials correctly and reinforcing positive recycling habits.

For a large public event where spectators can bring their own food and beverages, some landfill and non-recyclable waste is unavoidable. Even so, the GranFondo achieved a 90.7 % diversion rate, meeting official Zero Waste status and demonstrating the impact of careful planning, vendor collaboration, and hands-on support from AWARE's Zero Waste Heroes.

Key operational changes

The plan originally called for five staffed Zero Waste stations around Olympic Plaza and one unhosted back-of-house station for catering. On event day, the unexpectedly high volume of materials required all stations, including the back-of-house location, to be fully hosted to maintain clean streams and diversion targets. The station at the finish-line BBQ was also relocated for greater visibility after early-day monitoring showed it was being missed by attendees. A large surge in foot traffic between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. would have benefited from higher capacity and staffing during that peak period, to ensure waste separation kept pace with the influx. These real-time adjustments were critical to maintaining the event's diversion rate and highlight the value of on-site flexibility and responsive station management.

Challenges

1. **External packaging.** A significant amount of food packaging was brought into the event by attendees purchasing from businesses outside the park. Much of this packaging was non-recyclable plastic and heavily soiled with food, making it unsuitable for recovery. This increased the volume of material sent to landfill and introduced contamination risks.

Recommendations

1. **VIP Food-Waste Prevention - Adjust prep and service schedule.** The VIP lounge produced a substantial share of the event's compostable waste, primarily from uneaten food which was prepared and set out, but not selected by riders. Because health regulations limit redistribution options once food is public-facing, the most effective strategy is to reduce surplus at the source. We recommend working with the catering team to:
 - Monitor real-time attendance and consumption to track how many guests are actively dining in the final hours and scale production accordingly.
 - Stagger food preparation and shift to smaller, more frequent replenishments late in the day so portions better match declining demand.



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- Clearly communicate a final serving window to guests and staff, allowing the cooks to wind down without over-producing.
- Evaluate menu design, and focus on items that can be easily repurposed or safely stored for staff meals.

Implementing these steps would prevent a significant portion of edible food from entering the compost stream while maintaining a high-quality VIP experience.

2. Vendor and local business alignment

- Encourage all food vendors to continue using certified compostable or fully recyclable packaging, and provide them with updated guidelines at least one month before the event.
- Pilot a reusable serviceware program (cups, plates, or cutlery) for the VIP lounge or a designated vendor to further reduce single-use items.
- Early outreach to cafés, restaurants, and retailers around Olympic Plaza can help drastically reduce contamination from off-site packaging. Share the GranFondo's zero-waste objectives and provide simple guidance on preferred packaging (e.g., BPI-certified compostables or easily recyclable containers) as well as clear labeling requirements. Encourage these businesses to offer incentives for guests who bring their own reusable cups or containers.

3. Station Planning and Peak Management

- Maintain flexibility to increase staff or add capacity during peak periods (1–4 p.m.), particularly near food stations and directly behind the Plaza Lawn.
- Position key stations for maximum visibility, especially in high-traffic food areas like the BBQ.

4. Highlight sustainability efforts. Include Zero Waste efforts in communications (e.g., event website, signage, social media) to recognize the commitment and raise public awareness about leadership in waste reduction.

5. Continue engaging and training on-course Captains and Volunteers. Volunteers and aid-station captains were trained ahead of the event on sorting best practices and what to expect on the day, which resulted in minimal contamination from on-course waste streams. Maintaining this focus ensures high diversion rates and clean, properly sorted materials at future events.

Conclusion

The 2025 RBC GranFondo Whistler demonstrated that large, high-energy public events can achieve exceptional waste-diversion results when planning, education, and on-site responsiveness align. Through the combined efforts of AWARE's Zero Waste Heroes, event staff, vendors, and volunteers,



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more than 90 % of all materials, including over a metric tonne of edible surplus food, were kept out of landfill, directly supporting the Resort Municipality of Whistler's ambitious Zero Waste Action Plan.

Looking ahead, opportunities such as refining VIP catering practices, piloting reusable serviceware, and deepening outreach to nearby food businesses can drive diversion even higher while reducing overall material generation. Two key goals for RBC GranFondo 2026 should be:

1. Maintain 90%+ diversion rate.
2. Reduce total material generated, especially surplus food.

By pairing consistently high diversion with strategies to cut total waste, particularly surplus food, the GranFondo can show that large-scale celebrations need not generate large-scale waste. Building on 2025's lessons, the event can continue setting the benchmark for sustainable mass-participation events and inspire the wider community to embrace waste-reduction practices year-round.

Zero Waste Heroes Partnership

This initiative was supported by:

- Alexandra Cuschieri, Program Manager Zero Waste, AWARE - acuschieri@awarewhistler.org
- Emily Kociolek, RBC GranFondo Whistler Race Director - emily@rbcgranfondo.com