

6. Consumables



Consumables, and workwear and cleaning supplies in particular, are sources of significant waste for a food business.

By their nature, many of these products are single use – designed to be used once and then discarded. Clearly hygiene and health and safety standards need to be maintained, and we wouldn't suggest you do anything to jeopardise them. But there remains a lot you can do to reduce the environmental impact of your workware, cleaning supplies and other consumables.

Things you can do to make a difference

6a. Cleaning supplies

- Only buy cleaning products made from plant-based ingredients
- Buy in bulk and use refillable products whenever possible

6b. Workwear

- Buy workwear made from recycled fibres
- Buy good quality, durable workwear designed to last
- Explore the benefits of renting instead of buying workwear
- Dispose of your workwear responsibly

6c. Other consumables

- Make a list of all the consumable items you are using (e.g. candles, menus)
- Identify reusable, recyclable or more sustainable alternatives

6a. Cleaning supplies

Thanks to new products and services, it's easy these days to keep your food business spick and span and have a clean conscience when it comes to the environment.

Many cleaning products are based on chemicals that are harmful both for humans and other animals and plants in the environment. These chemicals, also known as "volatile organic compounds," (VOCs) include phosphorous (which constitutes about 30 to 40 percent of dishwasher detergents), nitrogen, and ammonia.

When you use these chemicals in your toilets, sinks, dishwashers, or other appliances, the chemicals are eventually rinsed down the drain and the contaminants can build up to have a substantial and negative effect on wildlife.

A wide range of cleaning products are available that have been manufactured from natural plant-based ingredients and have a low aquatic toxicity. Method and Ecover are two such companies.

Delphis Eco is another. Proud owners of not one but two royal warrants, all their products are made in Britain, are free of VOCs and have never been tested on animals. All their bottles are made from 100% recycled plastic taken from UK

waste streams and they're working toward being entirely plastic free in the future. They also offer customers the chance to refill empty bottles, with refill stations located at retailers across the country.

Meanwhile, Planet Minimal provides cleaning and personal hygiene products to the hospitality industry and zero waste shops across London. Delivered using electric vehicles, the products are animal cruelty-free, biodegradable and lack the harsh chemicals that can be found in many commercial brands. All the products are housed in refillable containers, meaning no single use plastic waste is generated.



6b. Workwear

90% of the 33 million corporate garments that are provided to UK workers each year end up being incinerated or sent to landfill.

Workwear is a common requirement for food businesses. But manufacturing, supplying and disposing of all those aprons, chef jackets and hats uses up valuable natural resources, creates pollution and generates greenhouse gases.

There are lots of things you can do to reduce the environmental impact of workwear and cut costs at the same time.

Shop smart

Make sure any workwear you buy has been manufactured using recycled fabrics or fabrics made from sustainable fibres or recycled content. Once you start looking out for it, you'll be pleasantly surprised by how much choice there is and the innovative materials used.

For example, [Dennys Brands](#) has a wide range of hospitality and catering clothing made entirely from recycled plastic bottles. [Le Nouveau Chef](#) offers high quality workwear made from TENCEL® – a fibre made of eucalyptus wood which is extracted from responsibly-managed forests.

You should also make a conscious decision to buy high quality workwear that is designed to last. Favour durability rather than initial cost and you'll get garments that are fit for purpose and will last longer – meaning less waste.

Take care

Your workwear is an important investment. Take care of it. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on care, washing and storage.

You can extend the life of workwear by checking regularly for damage so that small rips and tears can be repaired as you go. Try not to wash it more often than necessary, as this wears out the garments more quickly, contributes to more water and energy consumption and releases more microplastic fibres into the ocean.



Rent don't buy

Why not start thinking about your workwear as a service? Renting your workwear instead of buying it makes environmental sense because:

- ♦ Rental companies like [Lindstrom](#) will collect and wash your workwear on an industrial scale, which is three times less carbon intensive than individual washing¹⁸.
- ♦ Rental workware is generally high quality and made to last.
- ♦ The company renting the workwear can dispose of the items responsibly at the end of their life.

Responsible disposal

- ♦ Eventually all workwear will reach the end of its useful life. You've taken good care of it and it's served you well; now all it asks is to be disposed of responsibly. There are a number of options available to you:
- ♦ Insist that your staff hand back their old uniforms before being issued with new ones – this will make sure you are in charge of what happens to them next.
- ♦ If you frequently dispose of workwear, there are recycling companies that will be happy to set up a recycling programme, including regular on-site collections.
- ♦ You could send the garments to a textile processor who can cut them up to be used for cleaning rags.
- ♦ You can upcycle uniforms by deconstructing them to create new garments.

- ♦ If there are no brand security issues (i.e. company logos) you can take the clothing to a textile bank, operated by organisations who will determine what can be sent to developing countries for re-use.
- ♦ Old clothing can be donated to charities who may be able to sell them to raise funds and extend the garment life.

Want to learn more?

Read the thought-provoking blog post from Hubbub – [Corporate uniforms: a chance to slow down?](#)

Learn about eco-friendly fibres on the [Sustain Your Style](#) website.

¹⁸. Lindstrom industrial washing efficiency calculator

6c. Other consumables

It's easy to over-look consumables. By their nature they are designed to be used, discarded and forgotten about.

Most food businesses rattle through consumables at the rate of knots – often without even realising it. Each of them, be it the menus you are printing, the candles you are lighting or the paper towels you are wiping your sides down with, present opportunities to apply the principles of the circular economy.

Individually these items may seem incidental – not big enough to worry about. But over the course of a year, across a city the size of London, all those menus, candles and paper towels really add up to a huge problem.

So get creative. Make a list of all the consumable items you use to support your business and come up with more sustainable alternatives. Taking the menu, candles and paper towel examples as a source of inspiration:

- ♦ **Menus** – could you project your menu on to a wall or write it on a blackboard instead of printing it?

- ♦ **Candles** – you could use LED energy-saving lighting and essential oils to create the mood and scent of a candle-lit dining space – and if you do choose to use candles, make sure you get someone like the [Recycled Candle Company](#) to collect them after use

- ♦ **Paper-towels** – replace your supply of single-use paper towels with re-usable cloths.

Look around your business with an open mind – the opportunities for reducing waste and saving money will soon start to present themselves.

