

ZERO WASTE-TO-LANDFILL Verification

What is Zero Waste-to-Landfill?

At its core, zero waste-to-landfill is exactly what it sounds like: diverting all wastes from landfill disposal. Businesses achieve zero waste-to-landfill by moving up the waste hierarchy (See Figure 1): reducing materials consumption & waste; reusing materials; recycling, composting, and using anaerobic digestion; and then, for what's leftover, recovering energy. In sum, it's all about reducing waste and beneficially reusing the waste we do generate.

Who can do it?

Nearly any business or facility can achieve zero waste-to-landfill. Although the amount of effort and steps needed can vary significantly, a quick look at public information shows a diverse group of companies, including Nestlé, Boeing, Kraft, Subaru, Bridgestone, and Unilever having achieved, or committed to, zero waste-to-landfill.

Why pursue zero waste-to-landfill?

Diverting waste from landfills saves costs and reduces environmental impacts. It can also give you a way to highlight the environmental achievements of your company, business, or facility. Diverting waste from landfills can help to meet your environmental goals – particularly greenhouse gas and energy efficiency targets – while also satisfying your supply chain requirements and establishing your operation as a leader amongst its peers.

Is there a standard definition?

Although the general concept is intuitive, there is currently no universally accepted definition of what zero waste-to-landfill means in practice. Currently, several organizations have developed their own standards, including Green Circle Certified, The Carbon Trust, Underwriters Laboratory (UL), and National Sanitation Foundation International (NSF). Each offers a third-party verification service against their own internal standard.

How are they different?

For one, they use different terms to describe zero waste-to-landfill. The NSF International standard uses only the term “Landfill-Free,” While UL and The Carbon Trust use the term “Zero Waste-to-Landfill.” Green Circle, on the other hand, recognizes both terms. UL separates its classification between Silver, Gold, and Platinum Zero Waste-to-Landfill status, which is based on the overall diversion rate of the process. Moreover, Green Circle, UL, and The Carbon

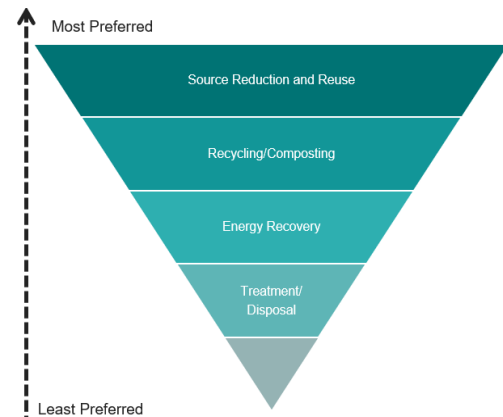


Figure 1. Waste Management Hierarchy

Trust can each verify your percent diversion as you move towards complete diversion.

In addition to utilizing different terminology, the standards differ with regard to the treatment of Waste-to-Energy (WTE) in zero waste-to-landfill calculations. UL imposes a 10% limit, unless there is a net carbon, energy, and environmental benefit for utilizing WTE over diversion options. Green Circle has no limitation for non-recyclable and not-economically-recoverable waste. NSF allows for up to 50% WTE, but facilities are required to have a 5-year plan to reduce WTE rates. The Carbon Trust doesn't place a numerical limit on energy recovery, but rather encourages waste reduction and continued movement up the waste hierarchy through its complementary Waste Standard.

What is third-party verification?

Third party verification is an independent audit that assesses the validity of your zero waste-to-landfill claim. The process looks at where your waste has gone in the past as well as your current waste management processes. The latter point is especially important, as the verifier wants to make sure that you will sustain your past performance in diverting waste from landfills. Upon the successful completion of the audit, you will receive a certificate and permission to use the logo and name of the verifier.

What are the benefits of third-party verification?

The most commonly cited benefit is additional credibility. From the Federal Trade Commission to environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to sustainability reporting and rating organizations, there is increasing interest in making sure public claims are accurate and verifiable. Obtaining a third-party verification gives you added credibility and assurance in the marketplace that your claims are sound. An important benefit that many overlook is the insight that a third party can bring to your process. A third-party review can help you identify risks or opportunities for improvement that you might not otherwise discover.

What should I expect when going through an audit?

You should expect a site visit, potential visits of your downstream waste outlets, and an intensive review of records, procedures, and other documentation. During the process, your auditor will likely focus on:

Procedures	What procedures are in place to ensure proper waste management?
Records	Can you demonstrate where the waste went? (invoices, bills of lading, weigh tickets, etc.)
	How was the waste managed at its destination?
Communication / Training	Do your employees know how waste needs to be managed?
	What communication tools are in place?
Documentation	Can you document that WTE was the appropriate mechanism for managing waste remaining after recycling?
Site Visits	What waste streams are being generated? How are they managed in practice?
	Are downstream suppliers managing the waste as stated?

After their review, your auditor may develop a list of corrective actions that you'll need to address before they can verify your claim. They likely won't be able to help you too much in finding necessary solutions: auditors generally maintain a strict policy against providing consulting services. Consequently, having good waste management partners with strong tracking systems and support teams in place is instrumental for completing the audit successfully and addressing any corrective actions identified.

How do I choose a verifier?

Remember that you are choosing both a verifier and a standard when you make your decision. So, you'll need to evaluate your options from both sides:

1. Each standard is a little different in the details, so doing your due diligence on the front end will help you avoid surprises when you are going through the process.
2. Look at the reputation and experience of the verifier: Have they worked in your industry? What kind of partnerships have they formed that might raise concerns over their impartiality?
3. If you can, get to know the team that will be working on your project. You'll be interacting with them closely once you sign the contract.

Where is this trend going?

Businesses will continue to focus on more sustainable materials management and landfill diversion to save costs and reduce environmental impacts. Concurrently, they will also continue to communicate their goals and successes. As this becomes more prevalent, we expect that the demand for verification will also grow.

With regard to the standards process, we may see a more unified, consensus-driven, standard coming out of ANSI and ASTM; however, these standards are still a ways off. In the meantime, the independent standards will remain.

For more information, please e-mail us:
sustainability@reworldwaste.com

