

Green Meetings

A Professional Guidance Statement of the American Meteorological Society
(Adopted by the AMS Council on 3 January 2011)

Background

As a professional organization whose members are keenly aware of environmental issues, AMS strives to be in the forefront of environmental stewardship. AMS places a high priority on using natural resources responsibly in conducting meetings and scientific conferences, in accord with the *AMS Green Conference Guidelines* (adopted September 2007). The purpose of this statement is to help AMS members involved in meetings and conferences minimize their negative environmental impacts and thereby maximize their societal benefits.

The green¹ meetings guidance herein addresses a wide array of meeting types and sizes and is not restricted to AMS-sponsored events. Helpful suggestions are offered, not hard-and-fast rules, because circumstances vary. While some choices are clearly greener, others are more ambiguous. The suggestions are based on a 2010 survey of industry-wide guidelines and represent current best practices. However, they should be reviewed and revised as technologies, understanding, and options continue to develop.

This statement is organized to cover a variety of aspects of professional meetings: scoping and planning; working with contractors and vendors; exhibiting; and participating as an attendee. As this statement addresses only some of the myriad decisions associated with meetings that have environmental impacts, a list of Web-based resources is included for further information and ideas.

The statement focuses on traditional, face-to-face meetings. However, as meeting agendas are being considered, an evaluation should be made as to whether other, less resource-intensive, options for interaction among colleagues (such as video/telephone conferences and Web-based remote meetings) may meet the group's needs.

Suggested Green Practices and Actions

Meeting Planning

- Advise participants in advance of the meeting's green goals and request their cooperation and participation in meeting them.
- Seek sponsors and donors reflecting positive environmental values and practices.
- Select a destination consistent with the meeting purpose and attendees' locations, connected with major transportation hubs via mass transit systems, and conducive to walking and biking.

¹ The term "green" is used here to describe environmentally responsible and sustainable practices that minimize waste, pollution, energy consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions.

- Consider using offsets programs to reduce impacts of carbon emissions associated with attendee travel, and provide attendees with relevant information.
- Consult convention and visitors bureaus regarding venues and suppliers using green practices.
- Provide opportunities for some (e.g., keynote) speakers to deliver addresses remotely and avoid traveling to the meeting for a brief stay.
- Extend the conference benefits with minimal environmental impact by providing online opportunities for people not attending the conference to obtain conference information.
- Minimize participant gifts, but when provided minimize packaging and toxic materials.
- Minimize printed material, use paper with certified recycled content and a high proportion of postconsumer content, avoid chlorine-bleached paper, and print double-sided using vegetable-based inks.
- Use local products and talent when possible to minimize transportation-related pollution.
- Provide participants opportunities to comment on the environmentally friendly practices of the conference and suggest improvements.

Working with Contractors and Vendors

Inform all parties providing meeting services of the meeting's environmental goals. Include language in contracts stating vendors' commitment to comply with environmental requests. Some suggested requests are listed below.

HOTELS:

- Conserve energy in guest rooms by shutting blinds, turning off lights, and turning down the heat/air conditioning when rooms are vacant.
- Provide soaps, shampoos and lotions in dispensers rather than small containers.
- Provide a linen and towel reuse program.

CONFERENCE SITE:

- Recycle paper, metal, glass and plastic products. Provide convenient and well-marked containers for recycling and composting.
- Turn off lights and other electrical equipment when not in use.

FOOD SERVICE:

- Request advance registration for food functions to obtain a realistic estimate of attendance and to avoid food waste.
- Offer vegetarian meals, because meat production involves more energy and resource use.
- Employ reusable cutlery, dishware, linens, and decorations. If disposables are unavoidable, use compostable or biodegradable types.
- Serve condiments, beverages, and other food items in bulk rather than individual packages. Recycle food packaging.

- Serve local tap water (filtered if necessary) rather than bottled water, in reusable or compostable cups.
- Donate leftover food to appropriate food banks.
- Compost organic material.

Exhibiting

- Choose reusable decorations and displays. Limit handouts and giveaways; instead collect names of those interested in receiving information or product samples. Provide materials electronically rather than on paper.
- Use locally grown/made products.
- Bring only what is needed for the event (to avoid excess shipping), and take away (rather than throw away) what is not distributed.
- Recycle cardboard, pallets, paper, cans, plastic, glass and other recyclable materials.
- Consider implementing a “Virtual Exhibit Floor” to provide information to attendees and others online.

Attending the Meeting

- Choose personal transportation options carefully. Consider alternatives to air travel if possible, or take direct flights. Use public transportation or carpool. Walk or bike when possible. Consider purchasing carbon offsets.
- Minimize use of paper products. Don’t take unneeded printed material or other items.
- Take responsibility for your hotel room. Consider sharing a room when appropriate. Request room cleaning and fresh linens less often if daily services exceed your needs. Use heating and air conditioning only when needed.
- Consider vegetarian meals. Minimize use of disposable containers and utensils. Don’t waste food.

Information Resources and Tools

The Oceans Blue Foundation offers tips for planners and suppliers.

<http://www.bluegreenmeetings.org/index.htm>

The Convention Industry Council provides recommendations on best practices.

http://www.conventionindustry.org/projects/green_mtgs.htm

The Netherlands recommends a short check list for green meetings.

<http://www.holland.com/meetings/uk/green-meetings/green-meetings-checklist/>

The Green Meetings Industry Council offers a collection of resources.

<http://www.greenmeetings.info/Default.aspx?pageId=724957>

MeetGreen offers one of many resources for green meeting destination selection.
<http://www.bestplacetomeetgreen.com/>

The National Recycling Coalition's Green Meetings Policy has ideas on working with exhibitors.
<http://www.nrc-recycle.org/greenmeetingsp.aspx>

The Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Protection Agency offer tools for estimating personal carbon emissions associated with travel, food choices, etc.
<http://www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator/?src=112>
http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html

The American Geophysical Union offers general policies and tips for attendees.
<http://www.agu.org/meetings/fm09/green-initiatives/index.php>

The University Corporation for Atmospheric Research Sustainability Office offers resources for UCAR meetings. <http://www.fin.ucar.edu/sustainability/greenoffice.html>

The AMS Green Conference Guidelines specifically addresses AMS meetings. In general, the AMS Meetings Department aims to meet or exceed the recommendations in this statement in organizing AMS conferences. <http://www.ametsoc.org/MEET/greenconferenceguidelines.html>

[This statement is considered in force until January 2016 unless superseded by a new statement issued by the AMS Council before this date.]

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