

Reusable dinnerware at work

It changes nothing while
changing everything



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Adopting reusable dinnerware for your lunch or coffee breaks is easy to organise and beneficial for staff, the environment and the finances of your business. This guide will help you to understand the advantages, to prepare for the transition and to choose the right equipment.

Did you know?

- 70% of take-away customers want to reduce the use of throw-away packaging.
- 50% of all take-away occurs at work, mainly for the mid-day meal.
- Some 160 restaurants in Geneva already offer reusable and returnable dinnerware.
- The deposit fee for a returnable meal box is CHF 10.– and CHF 5.– for a reusable cup.

In the Canton of Geneva, the “Smart take-away” campaign, a joint endeavour of the State and City of Geneva, the Services Industriels (SIG) and the éco21 programme, offers a range of resources to accompany businesses wishing to adopt this practice. Take advantage of the communications tools now available: small posters, post-it notes, reminders, stickers, and a set of visual aids for your publications and social networking. These tools will help you in reaching your teams and partners, and facilitate selecting adapted reusable solutions.



¹ www.ge.ch/en/teaser/let-take-it-smart

What does the law say?

About waste management:

- As of 2017, the Canton of Geneva has adopted a directive which puts an end to communal exemptions concerning the evacuation of the waste products of businesses and shops. This directive implements the principle of “polluter pays” established in the federal law on the environment. Under this law, businesses with less than 250 employees must pay the cost of elimination of the waste products they generate. The modalities are defined by the Commune in which the business is located.
- The new law on waste will forbid the use of single-use plastic articles in take-away restaurants (Law on Waste, adopted September 2, 2022, by the Grand Conseil (Parliament)).

Reusable dinnerware at the work place

A tool to enhance corporate social responsibility

Reduced impact on the environment

Reduces waste:

By adopting reusable dinnerware, businesses reduce the quantity of waste sent to incinerators and conserve the resources needed to make, transport and eliminate throw-away dinnerware.

Reduces impact on the climate:

Throw-away dinnerware is seldom recyclable. The long-term environmental impact of reusable dinnerware is considerably lower due to its longer life-span.

Long-term financial gain

Reduces the cost of waste management:

Less waste to collect and process means reduced costs for your business, thus enhancing the cost-effectiveness of reusable dinnerware.

Branding

Commitment to sustainable development:

Adopting reusable dinnerware demonstrates the commitment of your company to a sustainable future, enhancing its reputation and its CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) record.

Competitive edge:

Consumers and clients both value responsible businesses. Your business practices can become an asset in your commercial relationships and constitute an advantage in responding to calls for tender that include sustainability criteria.

Awareness raising

Impact on staff:

The shift to reusable dinnerware offers an opportunity to implicate your teams in sustainable practices, in reflecting upon their impact on the environment and the ways that each of us can contribute on a daily basis, and by creating an exemplary workplace.

Well-being at work:

Making quality reusable dinnerware available enhances the experience at meal and coffee time, thanks to a pleasant and clean work environment.

What does the law say?

Reusable dinnerware must meet two conditions:

- Be intended to contain food: it must have the proper pictogram .
- Be in conformity with the federal ordinance on materials and objects² which defines the allowable limits for migration of undesirable substances from reusable dinnerware into food.

Careful: wear and tear can cause substances to migrate into food. It is therefore important to monitor wear and tear, particularly for plastic.

In order to avoid unpleasant surprises, it is best to buy from a recognized supplier and to avoid buying from discount internet sites.

² [Federal Ordinance 817.023.21 on Materials and Articles Intended to Contact Foodstuffs](#)

Adopting reusable dinnerware in 6 steps



Evaluating the need

Analysing the need:

Analyse the quantity and sorts of dinnerware required (pitchers and glasses, cups and mugs, dishes, cutlery, take-away boxes) for all relevant spaces and uses: coffee-breaks, meals, meeting and conference rooms, waiting rooms, special events, taking into consideration washing cycles.

Budget:

Determine the budget available for the purchase of reusable dinnerware, washing and storage. This may imply the purchase of one or more washing machines, or require an adaptation of the cleaning arrangements for the premises.



Choosing the dinnerware

Aesthetics:

Prefer plain dinnerware to reduce theft.

Use and maintenance:

Choose containers adapted to both warm and cold meals, micro-wave and stove compatible, and easy to clean. Ideally also machine washable.

Materials:

Choose solid, durable and stain-resistant dinnerware. Prefer inert materials such as glass, ceramics, or stainless-steel compatible with the micro-wave. Quality dinnerware may cost more to purchase but will prove to be economical over the long-term.



Organise a system to collect and clean

Collection spots:

Depending on the size of the business, designate places to collect dinnerware after use and make provisions for their transfer to the cleaning area.

Cleaning equipment:

Arrange cleaning areas with the requisite materials and products (sponges, cleaning liquids, sufficient dish racks) or install washing machines (industrial or domestic).

Storage:

Arrange a well-organized and accessible space to store the cleaned dinnerware.

Organizing the system:

Consider including the tasks of cleaning, filling/emptying the washing machine and storing dinnerware in the contract with the cleaners.

Careful: the lack of proper organization of the cleaning is a major challenge in the change to reusable dinnerware.

1 Involve staff

Staff Charter:

Elaborate, or integrate into staff rules / charter, the commitment of the company to help to reduce the use of throw-away dinnerware. Communicate about the advantages of reusable dinnerware to secure staff involvement in the scheme. Clearly explain the approach and the environmental and economic impacts.

Monitoring and adaptation:

Monitor implementation to assess the efficiency of the scheme and the degree of satisfaction of staff and adapt accordingly. Day by day, encourage good practices.

Getting off to a good start:

In order to encourage staff to adopt reusable dinnerware, offer to each member of staff a kit containing certain basic elements, for example a flask, a cup, and a container for take-away meals. The personalization of dinnerware, for example with a name, encourages participation. Also, you might propose a contribution to the cost of purchasing personal dinnerware or negotiate a reduction in cost for your staff with a local supplier.

5 Going further

Challenge:

Organize events to encourage the acceptance of reusable dinnerware. Offer rewards to teams having attained certain goals. For example, participate in the RE:PAS CHALLENGE³.

³ <https://www.repaschallenge.ch/>

Awareness raising days:

Organize plastic-free days or weeks dedicated to the reduction of waste, with workshops, conferences and practical demonstrations.

Thematic days:

Participate in planned events on the theme of waste reduction, for example (partial listing):

Plastic free july:

<https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/>

Clean up day in Switzerland:

<https://www.igsu.ch/fr/clean-up-day/clean-up-day/>

World clean-up day:

<https://www.worldcleanupday.org/>

European waste reduction week:

<https://ewwr.eu/>

Zero waste events Switzerland:

<https://zerowasteswitzerland.ch/en/taking-action/events/>



6 External communications

Promotion of the initiative:

Share the initiative with your clients, your partners and with your social networks to give visibility to your commitments and to encourage other businesses to join.

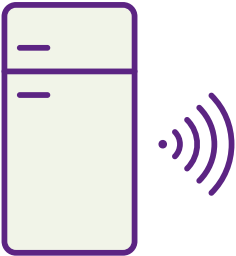
Partner restaurants:

Identify the places your staff go to for their take-away meals and encourage these establishments to propose returnable, reusable dinnerware.

Concerning equipment

Connected fridge:

More and more companies are installing connected fridges to offer a full-time meal service. Some providers work with 100% reusable dinnerware.

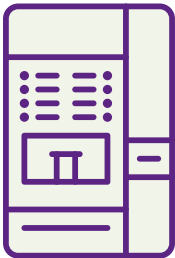
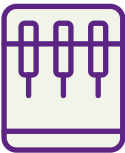


Water fountains:

If your layout permits, connect water fountains to the drinking water supply with the option of proposing sparkling water. This option is a good way to replace plastic water cylinders.

Fresh water dispensers:

Replace your dispensers of PET or canned drinks with flavored drink or soda fountains.



Hot water dispensers:

Some water dispensers can be programmed so that they do not distribute a cup so that one can use one's own cup. There are also reusable cups compatible with dispensers.

Reusable dinnerware in the work place: Ilem SA testimony

A conversation with Valérie Revillard, CFO



How did staff react to this initiative?

One the whole the initiative was well received by staff. The involvement of managers was a key factor in promoting participation.

Why did you introduce reusable dinnerware in your company?

Ilem adopted reusable dinnerware to be environmentally responsible, a move aligned with our values of innovation and personal effort. The main objective was to reduce plastic and throw-away waste in the company, particularly during lunch and coffee breaks. This effort is part of our aspiration to improve the ecological footprint of the company and to raise awareness among staff about good practices concerning sustainable development.



What were the main challenges you faced in implementing the shift to reusable dinnerware?

The first challenge was the accumulation items in the sink. A process had to be organized to implicate staff in the placing of their dirty dishes in the washing machines, and also to organize the emptying of the machines at the end of the cycle.

What advantages have you observed since the changeover?

- Significant reduction in plastic and cardboard waste.
- Improvements with a work environment that is more user-friendly and sustainable.
- Raised awareness among staff about eco-responsible practices.
- Medium and long-terms savings with reduced supplies of throw-away items.

With hindsight, what would you do differently to improve the approach?

With hindsight, we could have been more proactive with the management of the cleaning up by putting in place a more organized cleaning process (for example: designating time frames to avoid the accumulation of items). Better initial communication on the motivations and expected impacts of the project would have facilitated a more rapid acceptance.

Has the initial investment been advantageous in the long-term?

The initial investment was reasonable: purchase of reuseable dinnerware (glasses, dishes, cutlery, bowls) and the creation of an equipped (2 washing machines) cleaning area. Over the long term the approach has been economically beneficial by reducing recurrent purchases of throw-away dishes and take-away containers. The impact in budgetary terms was rapidly positive.

What has been the feedback have you received from staff?

For the most part feedback has been positive. Some staff members have even gone further by bringing their own items (coffee cups for example).

What advice would you give to a company wanting to embark on a similar process?

Accompany the transition with a clear and appealing communication effort.

Plan effective cleaning solutions from the outset (for example; dish-washers or task sharing).

Implicate staff from the outset to improve participation.

Emphasize the palpable benefits (waste reduction, savings, improved corporate image)

Accompany this initiative with other eco-responsible actions so as to prolong and widen the impact.

Impressum

September 2025

Graphic design: Grand Imperial SA

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