



Implementation Guide: Best Management Practices for Reusable Takeout Containers at Food Establishments in Massachusetts



Developed in 2024, provides best management practices for reusable takeout containers that align with the [Massachusetts Merged Food Code](#) to help food service establishments in Massachusetts reduce waste from single-use disposables.

1. Determine what menu items will be served in reusable takeout containers

2. Contact a service provider or choose a container to purchase

Establishments should first decide if they are:

Purchasing own reusable takeout containers

OR

Leasing containers through a service provider

Establishments should also decide:

If they plan to wash, rinse, and sanitize containers in-house following FDA guidelines for:

Mechanical Warewashing

OR

Manual Warewashing

If they plan to subscribe to an off-site third-party warewashing service.

The container selected is:

- ✓ Durable, corrosion-resistant, and non-absorbent;
- ✓ Sufficient in weight and thickness to withstand repeated warewashing (washing and sanitizing);
- ✓ Finished to have a smooth, easily cleanable surface;
- ✓ Resistant to pitting, chipping, crazing, scratching, scoring, distortion, and decomposition

Containers must be designed and constructed for reuse and in accordance with the requirements specified in the Massachusetts Food Code under Parts 4-1 (page 51) and [National Sanitation Foundation Institute \(NSF\)-certified.](#)

[GreenScreen Certified® for Reusable Food Packaging, Service Ware, & Cookware](#) is an additional evaluation of containers, including their chemical compositions such as PFAS.

3. Develop an Inspection Plan

Inspect containers after they are washed and sanitized to check for food residue, remaining debris, or physical damage, as one would any washed durable good [Source: Massachusetts Food Code, Part 3-304.17 (page 35)]. Look for:

- Cracks
- Dented beyond use
- Heavily scratched
- Lid (if applicable) doesn't fit securely
- QR code damaged, if applicable

Fill the container just as you would plate a meal or fill a single use to-go container.

Determine where and how the containers will be received from the customer and move to the washing area.

4. Develop a plan to wash rinse and sanitize

Dishwasher

Manually ware washing/3 bay sink

Third-Party off-site warewashing

5. Determine a plan for air drying

Consider the intricacy of container structure (e.g. gaskets, grooves etc.) which may result in increased difficulty/complexity in drying. Adjust drying procedures to compensate for intricate structures (e.g., allow more dry time; remove parts to dry separately.)



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6. Determine a plan for storing reusable containers

Receiving and storing reusables should follow the same guidelines as for storing dishes and/or utensils. The container holding the reusables needs to be clean and stored in a manner to prevent contamination. If a business is receiving a shipment of reusables or return of third party-washed reusables, they should follow similar guidelines to how they receive other materials: ensuring there is staff to appropriately unload the reusables, inspect them, and move them to the storage area.

This location ensures containers are:

- ✓ Six inches off the ground
- ✓ Covered or inverted
- ✓ Not exposed to splash, dust, or pests

7. Train employees on inspection, filling of containers, and collection

8. Determine incentive plan for customers:

Providing reusables may attract new or repeat consumers interested in reducing waste from single-use take out containers. When consumers return their reusables, they may also be more inclined to purchase another meal since they are already at the establishment. Consider:

- Discount on each order
- [Point and Loyalty Programs](#)

9. Build marketing opportunities, promote environmental benefits, increase long-term financial savings

While initial implementation costs exist, switching to reusable containers can significantly reduce ongoing purchasing and disposal expenses, which may ultimately save businesses money. Reuse supports the sustainability goals of the local community/ municipality and potential customers. Reusable containers reduce waste, help mitigate greenhouse gas emissions created in the production and disposal of single-use items and save natural resources. Implementing a reusable container program can help meet business and state sustainability goals.

For any questions about switching to reusable containers or if you are a business that would like no-cost assistance with implementing a reusables program, contact the RecyclingWorks MA hotline. Phone: 888-254-5525 Email: info@RecyclingWorksMA.com