

# Zero Waste Symposium returns in person to the North Bay

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Noah Abrams

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*photo credit: Noah Abrams/KRCB*

Event poster for 2023 Zero Waste Symposium

Sustainability experts gathered on Thursday, May 11th, for Sonoma County's Zero Waste Symposium.

The event was hosted by Zero Waste North Bay, the agency behind your curbside green bin, at Rohnert Park's SOMO Village, which played a fitting host for the 4th annual edition of the symposium.

The former Hewlett Packard complex was once slated for demolition after its operations were offshored, but instead, the 200 acre site has been recycled into an eco-conscious multi-use business park.

Speakers addressed waste, sustainability, and environmental issues. Including the issue of PFAS - so called "forever chemicals":

"This is what I call the DDT of our generation," said midday keynote Heidi Sanborn. "Do not underestimate the damage these chemicals are causing. They've put them in everything from our Teflon cookware, to your raincoat, to your Stainmaster carpet."

"It's everywhere and it's in us," Sanborn, the executive director of the National Stewardship Action Council said.

Textile recycling was also discussed.

"We know sorting [is] happening all over the world, so if the materials are coming from California, they should adhere to the responsibility and requirements that California requires of our own domestic in-state sorters," Joanne Brasch of the California Product Stewardship Council said.

Making sure extra homegrown produce gets distributed to those in need was also discussed.

"We found out that 90% of backyard trees are fruit goes to waste," Kelly Conrad of Farm to Pantry said. "So when we [found] there were people hungry in Sonoma County, we wanted to establish a nonprofit that basically got all of the fruits and vegetables from this very, you know, bountiful county, and then got it to those in need."

Zero Waste Sonoma's executive director Leslie Lukacs said there's plenty the public can do to help reduce waste.

"Use reusable water bottles, refuse straws and lids, divert your material correctly in the green bin or blue bin," Lukacs said. "Every little thing helps."

This year's North Bay Zero Waste Week runs from July 23rd-29th, 2023.