

MAKE SMARTER

MATERIAL CHOICES FOR EXHIBITION STANDS

Your Guide to evaluate stand materials through the lens of sustainability.

The 7R Circular Hierarchy

1. Rethink
2. Refuse
3. Reduce
4. Reuse
5. Repair
6. Rot *
7. Recycle

*Compost

The materials you choose for your exhibition stand can significantly influence its environmental impact. However, material choice is only part of the story. Factors such as durability, transport requirements, reuse potential and end-of- life recovery all play an important role. In many cases, a material that can be reused multiple times may have a lower overall impact than one that is recyclable but used only once.

STAND MATERIALS

Material	Re-use	Durability	End of Life	Transport	Health Concerns	Certification	Notes
Aluminium System	Excellent	Strong, long lifespan	Highly recyclable- commonly melted down and reused	Packs flat but relatively heavy	Generally low in use	None typically required	Widely available; modular systems support high reuse rates
MDF Board	Limited	Moderate; prone to edge/chip damage	Difficult to recycle locally; often landfilled	Bulky, medium-heavy	Can contain formaldehyde-based VOCs	FSC preferable if wood fibre is certified	Paints, laminates and adhesives can further reduce recyclability
Timber / Plywood	Good if designed for reuse	Good; repairable and adaptable	Reuse, upcycling, recycling, or composting depending on finishes	Bulky, relatively heavy	Generally low if untreated; coatings may add VOCs	FSC-certified timber recommended	Often more reusable than MDF if modular construction is used
Cardboard/ Honeycomb Board	Moderate to good	Moderate; sensitive to moisture and crushing	Widely recyclable and repulpable if uncontaminated	Lightweight; packs flat efficiently	Generally low	FSC-certified options widely available	Rapidly growing as a lightweight alternative to MDF and PVC boards
Acrylic / Perspex	Moderate	Durable but scratches and cracks over time	Technically recyclable, though limited local recycling infrastructure	Packs flat but relatively heavy	Generally low in use	Recycled-content acrylic available in some markets	Often reused for premium finishes, shelving and signage applications

Note: Recyclable does not always mean recycled. Local infrastructure, material contamination and disposal practices all influence whether materials are successfully recovered. Consider the full lifecycle of a material, including what happens after the event.



Information provided by the Event Greening Forum.
Practical sustainability for smarter exhibitions & events.

+27 (0)82 891 5883

www.eventgreening.co.za

info@eventgreening.co.za

www.greendatabase.co.za

GRAPHICS



Material	Re-use Potential	Durability	End of Life Reality	Health / Environmental Concerns	Better Practice	Notes
PVC Vinyl	Limited	Good	Difficult to recycle locally; often landfilled	PVC production and disposal have environmental concerns	Reduce single-use applications; design for longer-term reuse	Widely available and affordable in SA
Foam board / Correx	Moderate but prone to wear	Moderate	Often landfilled; recycling options limited and inconsistent	PVC-based variants (like Foamex) can be difficult to recycle	Use paper-based alternatives where possible	Commonly used for temporary signage and wayfinding
Paper-based Rigid Board (e.g. Xanita board, Falconboard, Re-board)	Good if handled carefully	Moderate; vulnerable to moisture and edge damage	Widely recyclable if uncontaminated	Generally low; water damage can shorten lifespan	Design for multiple uses and avoid heavy lamination where possible	Lightweight alternative to PVC-based boards; increasingly popular for exhibition graphics and displays
Fabric Graphics	Good if designed for reuse	Good	Some reuse and upcycling potential; recycling options limited locally	Synthetic fabrics may shed microplastics over time	Use modular branding and timeless designs to extend lifespan	Increasingly popular due to lightweight transport and premium appearance
Paints / Inks / Coatings	N/A – depends on substrate reuse	Moderate	Usually disposed of with substrate material	Some paints and inks may contain VOCs or solvents	Choose low-VOC paints and water- or vegetable-based inks where possible	Finished can significantly affect recyclability and reuse



FLOORING

Material	Re-use	Durability	End of Life	Health / Environmental Concerns	Better Practice	Notes
Needle-punch carpet	Limited	Moderate to good for short-term use	Often landfilled after events due to contamination and adhesive use	Synthetic fibres may shed microplastics; difficult to recycle once contaminated	Reduce single-use applications and avoid permanent adhesive installation where possible	Commonly used in exhibitions due to low cost and fast installation
Carpet tiles	Good	Good; damaged sections can be replaced individually	Reuse possible; some recycling programmes exist but landfill remains common locally	Synthetic materials and backing systems may complicate recycling	Use reusable installation systems and select recyclable tile programmes where available	Longer lifespan than broadloom exhibition carpet
Raised modular flooring	Excellent	Strong, long lifespan	Typically reused many times; eventual recycling depends on material type	Generally low in use; heavier transport footprint possible	Maximise long-term reuse across multiple events	Higher upfront cost but strong reuse potential over time



Are you seeking **greener** materials, suppliers and service providers?
Our free-to-use online Green Database could have what you need.

Simply go to:

greendatabase.co.za

