

**Washington State Recycling Association
Washington Multifamily Recycling Study Group
Review of Multifamily Recycling Programs in the United States and Canada**

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings of a survey of solid waste and recycling agencies (organizations outside of Washington State) in the United States and Canada to identify and assess multifamily recycling programs. The project findings are represented in six focus areas, including:

1. Policy and Regulation
2. Incentives
3. Promotion and Education
4. Educational Materials
5. Containers
6. Barriers and Challenges

This work was developed by the Washington Multifamily Recycling Study Group (WAMRS). The committee included fourteen members who conducted telephone and email surveys of forty-three agencies and waste management companies who were asked about successful multifamily recycling and food scrap collection programs.

The committee selected respondents from the ten Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regions in the United States, and in Canada. Each committee member was responsible for identifying and surveying three to four cities per state in their region. Respondents were asked to provide examples from their jurisdictions of multifamily best management practices, regulations, education and promotion strategies, incentives used to increase recycling, and challenges/barriers to increased recycling and food waste composting.

This survey and its development, research and findings analysis occurred over a period of one year between April 2012 and April 2013. Following are the profile findings:

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PROFILES

1. Policy and Regulation – “Make it Mandatory & Enforce It”

Interviews revealed many jurisdictions across the country have regulations requiring recycling services for multifamily dwellings, but that few focus on enforcement.

- **Notable Recycling Ordinances and Laws:**

- Solid Waste Authority’s ordinance requires that 30% of waste collection capacity at multifamily developments be dedicated to recycling. (Sacramento CA)
- City assesses a fee of \$2.60 per residential unit to the property owner to cover the cost of recycling program. For group housing (e.g., fraternities and sororities), the fee is \$1.30 per resident, based on the capacity of the facility. (Champaign, IL)
- Through Assembly Bill 341, the State of California requires commercial enterprises and multifamily developments with five or more units to adopt recycling practices. AB 341 also sets a goal of 75% recycling by 2020. (California)
- Nevada counties with populations of 100,000 or more must provide for curbside collection of recyclables. Plans for construction or major renovations of multifamily developments must include provisions for the placement of recycling containers on the property. (Nevada)

- **Noteworthy Enforcement:**

- City’s Mandatory Recycling Ordinance requires that any building that generates waste in Cambridge must recycle. All new multifamily developments with 75 units or more must submit a recycling plan to the Department of Public Works. Drivers report back about contamination issues and staff work to get them into compliance. City inspectors can give \$25 fines for non-compliance. (Cambridge, MA)
- Property managers are required to provide recycling bins at multifamily buildings. Housing inspections are done every 24 months to ensure participation in recycling program. (Ann Arbor, MI)

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2. Incentives – “Create a Reason to Participate”

Respondents indicated incentive options can entice residents to participate in programs. The profiles highlight a mix of creative ways to encourage participation.

- **Financial**

- Cost savings through recycling with discount offers or decrease in garbage container size. (San Francisco, CA; Nevada)
- “WRAP” program provides rebates for service and start-up costs for complexes ready to start a new recycling program. Also includes, free on-site recycling assessments, guideline posters, and help developing communication materials, as well as general technical and logistical recommendations. (Fort Collins, CO)
- City offers up to \$2,000 to reimburse recycling program startup costs (covers equipment and tenant education). (Honolulu, HI)
- A partnership of the city, local hauler and RecycleBank enhance recycling for residents who participate to receive points to redeem coupons/vouchers at local and national retail establishments. (San Jose, CA)
- Residents of buildings with 20 or fewer units pay individually for garbage service so they have a direct incentive to recycle (recycling is free). (Portland, ME)
- Multifamily properties that exceed County garbage threshold standards must contract separately for additional collection and service costs, creating an implicit financial incentive to maintain lower garbage volumes. (Baltimore County, MD)

- **Freebies or Giveaways**

- Provides recycling tote bag for use in unit to sort, store and transport recyclable items to the outside recycle containers. (Langley, British Columbia)
- City Staff delivers a free 18-gallon recycling collection container to each unit. (Portland, ME)
- Create a drawing when Property Managers submit orders in time to create an increase in participation. (Portland, OR)

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- Department of Environment provides free consultations to property owners and managers as well as free kitchen pails for each unit. (San Francisco, CA)
- An incentive and education program is in development and will provide in house recycling bags (for tenants to bring out to recycling bins/dumpsters) providing door to door outreach and additional waste reduction and recycling support. (Boulder, CO)
- **Award Programs**
 - Reward to the property manager as part of a competition between complexes to identify the best trash enclosure (design, access, customer education). (San Jose, CA)
 - “Recycler of the Month” award for the best complex, media attention; environmental award from mayor. (San Diego, CA)
 - Volunteer based “Ambassador” program provides recycling support and training opportunities. (Langley, British Columbia)

3. Promotion and Education – “Build a Network-Make it Relationship Intensive, Face-to-Face and Continuous”

Creating and maintaining relationships between property managers, residents and the community is crucial.

- **Direct Relationships with Managers**
 - Engage with and form a close, consistent relationship with building managers and provide timely customer service. (Ann Arbor, MI)
 - It is more efficient and successful to work with owners and managers in several neighborhoods than it is to work with several tenants in one building. (Boise, ID)
 - Employ a dedicated staff person to assist building managers with program implementation, resident education and material distribution. (Prince George, MD)

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- **Face-to-Face with Residents**

- The “Green Apartments” campaign utilizes staff to go door to door and talk about recycling with apartment residents. (San Francisco, CA)
- Attend board meetings or apartment open house events to talk with residents and distribute educational materials. (Boise, ID)
- New York City engages volunteers with the Apartment Building Recycling Initiative (ABRI), a program for residents who want to help better the recycling at their building. (New York, NY)

- **Continuous Outreach**

- Ongoing promotion and outreach (i.e., monthly email newsletter to property manager) is important due to high turnover.(Portland, OR; Cambridge, MA)
- Consider using a tracking system such as driver reports as a way to monitor successes and obstacles and as a way to check in with managers about the building’s recycling progress. (Eureka Recycling, MN)

4. Educational Materials – “Make them visual, translated & accessible”

Print and web-based materials letting residents know how, where and what to recycle are key components of an education strategy. At the same time, some formats and modes of distribution may be more effective with regard to increasing recycling than others.

- **Rely on visual images**

- Communication with pictures is helpful in communities with limited English proficiency. (Portland, ME; Eureka Recycling, MN)

- **Translate materials into multiple languages**

- Distribute information in residents’ native languages helps reach a broader audience. Bilingual flyers with English and another language and container stickers may be particularly effective. (Largo, FL; Urbana, IL)

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- **Use a variety of formats**
 - Consider diverse ways in which residents access information. Making materials available in print via door hangers, flyers, campaign signs and web. (Fort Collins, CO; San Antonio, TX)

- **Distribute widely and often**
 - Recycling information may be useful to residents in multiple locations: on refrigerator magnets or their in-unit collection container; in common areas; on outdoor containers, as well as posted around outdoor enclosures. High resident turnover may also demand frequent distribution. (Boise, ID; Portland, OR)

5. Containers – “Make them clear and convenient”

Convenience and clear marking of recycling containers is important to creating an environment that makes recycling easy and accessible.

- **Labels and Signage**
 - Local ordinance requires accurate labeling on containers. (Chittenden County, VT)
 - Recycling carts have a bilingual decal with photos showing what’s accepted in the recycling. (Urbana, IL)
 - Jurisdictions offer signs, stickers and posters online for residents and property managers. (Portland, OR)
 - If not all dumpster enclosures have recycling, agencies provide clear instructions and map for where to deposit recyclables. (Fort Collins, CO)

- **Size and Space**
 - Cities develop bylaws and ordinances that require sufficient space for recycling containers. (Chilliwack, British Columbia)

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- The City defines the financial savings that complexes can achieve should they downsize their garbage bins and provide space for more recycling bins. (San Jose, CA)
- Poor aesthetics of recycling area can be a barrier to participation (too dark, outside in weather, unsightly, odor). (Langley, British Columbia)

- **Convenience Factor**

- Recycling has to be as convenient as garbage disposal, so agencies recommend recycling chutes or recycle containers on each floor to make it easy for residents to participate. (Baltimore County, MD)
- Many agencies provide in-unit collection containers for transporting recyclables to central dumpsters or carts.
- Agencies work with existing space constraints and use clear bags for recycling collection. (New York, NY)
- Staff provides personalized assistance on the types of containers to provide onsite. (Prince George County, MD)
- For compost collection, city provides countertop compost bins or reusable Tupperware containers, as they don't smell and don't require expensive bags. (Boulder, CO)

6. Barriers and Challenges – “You Are Not Alone!”

Space limitations, contamination, resident turnover, language, education and outreach, and manager opposition to recycling programs were challenges widely cited by the jurisdictions interviewed.

- **Space**

- Many respondents reported “space” or “space constraints” as a general challenge. (Prince George County, MD; New York, NY; Baltimore County, MD; Chittenden County, VT; San Diego, CA; Alameda County, CA; Hamilton

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County, OH; St. Croix County, WI; State of Nevada; Fort Collins, CO; Boulder, CO)

- New and old buildings alike experience problems with insufficient space for recycling containers or inadequate access for collection vehicles. Notably, amendments to local bylaws are in process to address this issue for new buildings. (Chilliwack, British Columbia)

- **Contamination**

- Contamination was reported as a general problem, with various causes cited, including insufficient garbage capacity, illegal dumping, and lack of resident knowledge of the correct way to recycle.

- **High turnover**

- Several respondents expressed that a transient community with tenants moving in and out negatively impacts recycling by creating a continuous demand for outreach and education. This can lead to high marketing costs. (Largo, FL; Middletown, CT; Cambridge, MA; Portland, OR; Ann Harbor, MI; Champaign, IL)
- College towns or communities with nearby colleges can have high turnover with a low level of community investment or waste reduction awareness. (Boulder, CO)

- **Outreach & Education**

- Many multifamily developments provide housing for college students, who may follow different recycling rules at home. (Bloomsberg, PA)
- Challenges providing outreach materials to property managers. (Washington, D.C.)

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- Need for repeated outreach due to high turnover of multifamily residents. (San Jose, CA; Portland, OR; Ann Arbor, MI; Champaign, IL)

- **Opposition to participating in recycling**

The government recycling professionals interviewed repeatedly cited opposition to recycling from property managers. Some examples of manager concerns about recycling include:

- Loss of parking spaces to provide recycling containers. (Raleigh, NC)
- Additional costs to provide recycling. Rebates do not encourage managers to participate. (Fort Collins, CO; Hamilton County, OH)
- Opposition to recycling by multifamily housing associations. (Baltimore County, MD; Dubuque, IA)

- **Language Barriers**

- Recycling professionals perceived that educating residents about recycling in communities with multiple languages and cultures can be a challenge. (Cambridge, MA; Prince George County, MD; Boise, ID; Portland, OR; Honolulu, HI; Urbana, IL; Dubuque, IA; Iowa City, IA; Salt Lake City, UT)