



Seattle's New Recycling Regulations and Frequently Asked Questions

Seattle spends more than \$26 million every year to send 920 million pounds of garbage to a landfill, where it will sit for thousands of years. About 25% of that garbage is made up of paper, cardboard, aluminum cans, plastic bottles and yard debris that could have been recycled or composted.

Why waste a good thing? That's what Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels and City Council members asked when they passed an ordinance that aims to save residents and businesses as much as \$2 million a year and keep future garbage costs low. Ordinance 121372 is the first in a series of steps and programs designed to increase Seattle's recycling rate, conserve resources and lower the cost of doing business.

Recycling Regulations

Beginning January 1, 2005, City of Seattle Ordinance 121372 prohibits:

- Businesses from disposing of paper, cardboard or yard debris in the garbage. Exception: food-soiled or otherwise contaminated paper and cardboard.
- Residents (both single-family and multi-family) from putting paper, cardboard, glass and plastic bottles and jars as well as aluminum and tin cans in their garbage containers. Exception: food-soiled or otherwise contaminated paper and cardboard. (Yard debris has been banned from residential garbage since 1989.)

Frequently Asked Questions

How will the City enforce this ordinance with businesses?

1. Education in 2004: Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) began a promotional campaign regarding the new recycling requirements and the availability of free recycling assistance in March 2004.
2. Tagging in 2005: A commercial customer whose garbage containers are found – by random inspection – to contain significant amounts of recyclable materials will receive educational notices on their containers or by mail.
3. Enforcement in 2006: Beginning January 1, 2006, a commercial customer with significant amounts of recyclables in their garbage will receive two warning notices before being issued a \$50 fine.

What is considered “significant amounts of recyclable materials?”

“Significant amounts of recyclables” means a commercial garbage container or self-haul vehicle's load that contains more than 10% recyclables by volume (specifically paper, cardboard and yard debris – either alone or in combination) based on a visual inspection by a SPU inspector, contractor or transfer station worker.

Will our janitorial service have to go through the garbage and pull out recyclables?

The City is not expecting janitors or housekeeping staffs to pull out paper and cardboard that tenants, employees and/or guests (e.g., hotels) throw away. The City, however, does expect businesses to provide tenants, employees and/or guests with recycling containers, and to give them instructions on the means of recycling. Such notice should include mention that recycling is a City requirement.

Additionally, the City may not hold a business responsible if the public throws paper and cardboard into their street-side, non-locking garbage containers, assuming certain conditions outlined in the ordinance are met.

What if we don't have space outside for a recycling container?

Commercial customers may be exempted if a SPU inspection determines that there is not adequate space for recycling on site and no opportunity exists for sharing recycling containers with neighboring businesses or apartments. The inspection must be requested by the customer.

In a multi-tenant building, who will be held responsible for paper, cardboard or yard debris in the garbage?

The subscriber of the garbage account is responsible. If the **building owner** pays the garbage bill and provides solid waste services for all of the building tenants, then he/she is the garbage subscriber. If the building owner contracts with a **property management company** and that property manager pays the garbage bill and provides solid waste services for all of the building tenants, then the property management company is the garbage subscriber. If an individual **tenant**, like a restaurant, sets up its own, independent garbage account, then the tenant is the garbage subscriber.

Generally, your business or building is complying with the ordinance if you:

- 1) Provide all tenants, employees and/or guests with recycling containers for recyclable paper and cardboard.
- 2) Instruct them to recycle paper and cardboard and let them know that it is a City requirement.
- 3) Compost yard debris by either having it hauled away for composting or by composting it on site.
- 4) Maintain 10% or less (by volume, alone or in combination) recyclable paper, cardboard and yard debris in your garbage containers or self-haul loads taken to the City's Recycling and Disposal Stations.

To read the **SPU Administrative Rule**, which outlines the details of Ordinance 121372, visit www.resourceventure.org/rv/issues/waste/rec-ord/index.php or contact the Resource Venture at **(206) 389-7304** or help@resourceventure.org.

How do I educate my staff so they will recycle correctly?

Education, signage and container placement are the most effective ways to encourage others to recycle right. The City contracts with the Resource Venture, a non-profit program of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, to provide free waste reduction assistance to Seattle businesses. They offer free, self-adhesive recycling container labels, in multiple languages, that list what materials can and cannot be recycled and how to prepare them for recycling. The labels are appropriate for containers located at each employee's desk or workstation, next to printers and copy machines, in staff lounges and in conference rooms. Additionally, the Resource Venture has an employee-education guide called *Recycling at Work: 6 Steps to Increase Participation in Your Recycling Program*. It includes ideas on how to educate current and new tenants, employees and/or guests. To download or order labels or the 6 Steps guide, visit www.resourceventure.org/rv/issues/waste/rec-ord/index.php. You can also request hard copies by contacting **(206) 389-7304** or help@resourceventure.org.



Where do I go if I need assistance in setting up a recycling program?

The Resource Venture has helped Seattle businesses cost-effectively recycle since 1990. Download or order their *Recycling at Work: 7 Steps to a Successful Business Recycling Program* guide at www.resourceventure.org/rv/issues/waste/rec-ord/index.php. It includes a list of local recycling services, a checklist to help you compare and choose recycling services and all of the employee-education ideas found in the 6 Steps guide mentioned above. To request a hard copy of the *Recycling at Work: 7 Steps to a Successful Business Recycling Program* guide, or if you have any other questions or need further assistance, contact the Resource Venture at **(206) 389-7304** or help@resourceventure.org.

What happens to the materials we recycle?

Your recycled paper, cardboard, glass and plastic bottles and jars and aluminum and tin cans are processed, bundled and sold to manufacturing plants around the Northwest and all over the world. For example, recycled paper and cardboard are turned into everyday items like boxes, tissue paper and newspaper. Additionally, recycled plastic bottles are made into many products, including t-shirts, fleece clothing, polyester carpet, toys and, of course, new bottles. Lastly, aluminum cans are used to make cars, appliances and new cans. In fact, manufacturers can make a new can out of a recycled aluminum can in as few as 90 days!