

# Zero Waste in Action

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## Universal Recycling: Austin, Texas, USA

### Summary

Austin requires commercial buildings and multi-family properties to provide tenants with convenient recycling services. This must include appropriate signage, containers and education around the program.

### Population

885,000

### Year enacted

2010, with enforcement in 2012

### Who's affected

Apartments and businesses

### Overview of recycling requirements

All properties must recycle, at a minimum, mixed paper, cardboard, plastic bottles, glass bottles and aluminum cans. Properties can substitute any of these materials for another material that may increase diversion rates such as electronics, compostable materials, or pallets.

Commercial properties were initially required to have at least one unit of recycling service for every three units of trash service. In 2014, that shifted to a 1:1 ratio of weekly recycling service capacity to weekly trash service capacity. Multi-family properties must have at least 6.4 gallons of recycling service per dwelling, per week.

Indoor recycling containers should be paired with indoor trash containers whenever possible. Outdoor recycling containers must be located within 25 feet of trash containers. Haulers are required to post signage in English and Spanish to help residents and tenants sort for recycling.

Property owners are responsible for promoting the recycling by providing recycling information to new residents and tenants within seven days of move-in, at least once per year and within 30 days of program changes. Property owners are not responsible for tenants or employees using the recycling system.



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## Background

This program is an extension of the city's previous ordinance (1999) which only required businesses with more than 100 employees and multi-family units (MFUs) with more than 100 units to provide recycling services for a minimum of two designated materials at least twice a month.

The extension rolled out in phases, starting in 2012 with the largest properties—offices greater than 100,000 sq. ft. and MFUs with more than 75 units. Over four years the ordinance expanded to include commercial office buildings, institutional properties and private educational facilities over 25,000 sq. ft., and all MFU properties with more than 25 units.

A second phase of the ordinance will include the collection of compostable materials from food service operations by 2017. It will also expand the recycling service requirement to include the food and beverage industry, retail stores, grocers, lodging establishments, and industrial and manufacturing facilities.

## Enforcement

Property owners are required to submit recycling plan forms to the city to demonstrate compliance every year. The city waived the right to levy fines for the first 12 months of the program.

City staff may visit and inspect any property for compliance. If a violation is found, a notice is sent and the property has 30 days to comply before a second notice is sent, also with a 30-day compliance period. After two notices, the city can issue a fine between \$100 and \$2000.

The city provides the trash and recycling collection service to some small businesses located within residential areas or within the downtown service district. Licensed trash and recycling haulers cover the remaining collection.

## Cost

The program is estimated to cost the city \$500,000. This total includes hiring four staffers to enforce the program, educating tenants and managers about the rules, and maintaining a website to report the progress of the plan.

## Downloads

[Solid waste and recycling rules, Austin TX](#)

[Proposed phase two amendments for universal recycling ordinance, Austin TX](#)

## More information

[Austin's Universal Recycling Ordinance](#)

[Austin's Zero Waste Plan](#)

[Statesman article: "New Austin recycling rules effective Monday"](#)



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