

Zero Waste in Action

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Universal Recycling: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Summary

Recycling service is provided to all residents in Toronto, including multi-family properties. Single-family homes receive weekly curbside composting service. Composting service is offered to multi-family properties on a voluntary basis.

Population

2.5 million

Year enacted

1988

Who's affected

Households, Apartments

Background

Toronto committed to reduce its dependence on landfills and move toward Zero Waste in early 2000's. In 2012, residents living in single-family homes had a diversion rate of 66%. Multi-family residential buildings recycle about 24%, for a combined residential diversion rate of 52%.

Toronto's landfill crisis was the primary driver behind the city's increased emphasis on recycling and composting. The last remaining landfill in Toronto closed in the early 1990's. By 2002, Toronto was shipping its garbage to Michigan in the United States. However, with concerns over the international border and opposition from residents in Michigan, Toronto began to look to expand the city's recycling programs and introduce composting—organic material alone was 44% of the city's waste.

Overview of Residential Recycling Requirements

All homes in Toronto receive weekly collection of food scraps. Trash and recycling are collected every other week, but households can appeal to have trash picked up weekly. Yard waste is collected every other week from March through December.



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Collection is provided by the city, servicing more than 460,000 households. Recycling collection includes plastic bags, Styrofoam containers and rigid plastics such as CD cases, plastic plates and cups, and clamshell containers. Scrap metal and electronics can also be recycled at the curb.

Toronto has a pay-as-you-throw system for trash collection where residents are billed based on the amount of trash service used, rather than a flat rate. Trash charges are based on the size of residents' trash containers, and composting and recycling collection are included at no additional charge. Residents must purchase a tag for any extra waste that they put out for collection at a cost \$3.10 each.

Toronto collects food scraps weekly from residents through their "Green Bin Program." Every household receives a kitchen container for collecting food scraps for composting. Because Toronto collects food waste separately from yard waste, the city uses smaller curbside green bins that stand only 26 inches tall.

The program accepts all food scraps and soiled paper products, like most composting programs, but also includes animal waste and litter, and diapers and sanitary products, which makes the program fairly unique. (The Green Bin materials are processed through an anaerobic digester, rather than the more common windrow composting systems, which is why these additional materials are allowed. However, the city has struggled with the odors and general operations of the anaerobic digester, which raises questions about whether it is a best practice to include these materials in a composting program.)

Leaf and yard waste is picked up separately from food waste, and is collected every other week from mid-March into December. Residents can use their own containers or kraft bags for yard waste. The city will collect leaves, plant/tree trimmings, weeds, brush, and bundled branches. Toronto does not collect grass clippings from residents in either composting or trash. Residents are encouraged to compost them back into their lawn by grasscycling.

Overview of Multi-Family Property Recycling Requirements

The City of Toronto provides recycling and trash services to all multi-family units (MFUs). These buildings pay a fee for waste based on how many waste bins they set out. They can set out unlimited amounts of recycling without any extra charge.

Multi-family property managers must post instructions for recycling and organics collection for residents. Properties must participate in the recycling program in order to receive city collection services.

Multi-family properties can sign up for curbside composting on a voluntary basis. The city provides an in-kitchen composting container for each residential unit and collects the materials in either dumpsters or totes, depending on the property. The building owner must purchase the outdoor compost collection containers. The city first tested the program with a successful pilot to 30 buildings.

Overview of Business Recycling Options



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Toronto does not require businesses to recycle or to have recycling services. Most businesses contract for their recycling and trash services with private haulers.

However, the city does have an innovative approach to servicing small businesses. The city offers small businesses the opportunity to participate in its residential services through its Yellow Bag program, which provides weekly trash, recycling and food scrap collections.

Eligible businesses must be fewer than four floors and have less than 500 square meters of ground floor space. Recycling and food scrap collection are included at no charge. Businesses can pay extra to have organics picked up more frequently.

Each bag of trash costs \$3.10 and must be put in city-approved bags. Bulky items must be tagged for pickup; tags also cost \$3.10. The city offers some businesses a trash container for larger quantities. Charities, nonprofits and religious organizations are eligible to receive free trash service from the city under the Yellow Bag program.

Education

The city runs a 3Rs Ambassador Volunteer program at MFUs to educate residents about recycling and increase participation in the program. Suggested activities for Ambassadors include creating lobby displays, putting up information posters, and organizing waste diversion games and activities.

Downloads

[Municipal Code for Residential Recycling in Toronto](#)

[Municipal Code for Commercial Recycling in Toronto](#)

[Yard Waste Guidelines for Toronto](#)

[Recycling Guidelines for Toronto](#)

More information

[City of Toronto Garbage and Recycling Services](#)

[TheStar.com article: "20% of Toronto's Garbage Recycling Winds up in the Landfill"](#)



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