

# Zero Waste in Action

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## Curbside Composting: Portland, Oregon, USA

### Summary

In 2011 Portland began providing weekly compost pick-up for all food scraps and yard waste, and shifted trash collection to a bi-weekly schedule. Trash volumes decreased 37% within the first year and in 2013 the city was able to lower monthly collection fees.

### Population

603,000

### Year enacted

2011

### Who's affected

Households

### Overview

In 2011 Portland began providing weekly compost pick-up for all food scraps and yard waste, and shifted trash collection to a bi-weekly schedule. The service is available to single-family residents as well as small multiplexes with 2-4 units. Recycling is also picked up weekly.

The new program is expected to increase Portland's residential recycling rate from 51% in 2010 to 70% in 2012. The city has longer-term goals of 75% recovery by 2015 and 90% by 2030. The new program was driven by Portland's Climate Action Plan, which identified composting service and biweekly trash service as a key step in helping the city meet its carbon reduction goals.

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) contracts with 18 franchised haulers to provide collection of compost, recycling, and trash from households.

### Composting Service

The city previously had every other week yard waste collection for residents and changed to weekly collection that also included food scraps. Accepted materials now include food scraps and yard debris, meat, shellfish, and soiled paper such as napkins and pizza boxes. Customers received a 2-gallon pail for



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in-home food scrap collection when the program began. Additional kitchen containers are available for sale through the city.

Residents can use an approved compostable bag to collect food scraps but cannot put any food packaging, cups or utensils in the composting bin, even if those products are labelled compostable. Residents can set out additional yard debris in kraft paper bags or a labeled can, or bundled on the side of their cart. There is a charge of \$3.75 for each extra container or bundle.

## Biweekly Trash Service

Residents pay for collection services based on the size of the trash can needed, with recycling and compost included for no additional cost. This is a PAYT rate structure. Trash is collected biweekly in roll carts in 20, 35, 60 and 90-gallon sizes. Residents can also opt for collection every four weeks. An extra bag or can of trash can be set out on collection day for \$5 per container/bag. Customers can also subscribe to only recycling and composting service on an on-call basis and pay \$9.05 per pickup. Low-income households with adult incontinence or other health issues can upgrade to the next largest container size, or receive a second 35-gallon container, at no additional cost.

## Enforcement and Education

The city received nearly 8,000 phone calls related to the service change when the program began, but calls returned to normal volumes within three months.

The city contracted with volunteer community groups in the summer before the program changes to canvass 19,000 homes. Volunteers provided information about the new program to 26 neighborhoods with larger households, more renters, and a greater number of linguistically isolated residents. According to the city, "A particular effort was made to reach linguistically isolated households by recruiting bilingual volunteers, translating materials, utilizing translation services to place follow-up calls, and partnering with ethnic and cultural organizations to distribute educational materials."

There has been an increase in trash contamination in the recycling bin and the city began an education campaign in April 2012 to address the issue. Just 2% of bins had to be tagged for contamination and residents notified with a letter from the city. The city continues to monitor contamination and work on the issue.

## Results

Since the program began in 2011, Portland residents have reduced trash going to the landfill by 37% and nearly tripled the tons of yard and food waste collected. Participation in the program is fairly high with an estimated 78% of customers putting food scraps in their compost bins. Only 14% of customers were unhappy with the new program.

Trash and collection rates were lower for residents in 2013 as the volume of trash collected decreased, the costs of collecting food and yard debris decreased, and the cost of composting remained less than that of landfills. This came even as hauling companies invested in less-polluting trucks as part of Portland's climate action plan.



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## Downloads

[Portland Curbside Collection Service Year One Report](#)

[Portland Compost Program Launch Report](#)

## More information

[Garbage, Recycling, and Composting in Portland](#)



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