

Zero Waste in Action

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Disposal Bans: Seattle, Washington, USA

Summary

Seattle banned common recyclable materials from the trash at both homes and businesses, including paper, cardboard and yard waste.

Population

652,000

Year enacted

2005

Who's affected

All

Overview

In 2005 Seattle banned common recyclable materials from the trash at both homes and businesses. Households cannot throw away recyclable paper products, cardboard, glass and plastic bottles, aluminum and tin cans, or yard waste. Businesses cannot throw away recyclable paper, cardboard or yard waste.

The city can refuse to pick up the trash from residents or issue fines to apartments and businesses when more than 10% recyclable materials are found in trash bins.

Seattle has a goal of recycling 60% by 2015 and 70% by 2022, as well as reducing the total municipal solid waste tons disposed of by at least 1% each year.

Background

The city enacted the ban to increase its recycling rates and save up to \$2 million a year. Around 25% of Seattle's garbage was made up of paper, cardboard, aluminum cans, plastic bottles and yard debris that could have been recycled or composted.

Yard waste has been banned from Seattle's trash since 1989.

Enforcement and Exceptions

Seattle spent two years educating residents and businesses on the policy before enforcement began in 2006. The city enforces the ban in three ways:



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1. At single-family residences, the garbage contractors will not pick up garbage cans that contain significant amounts of recyclables. A notice is left on the can instructing residents to separate the recyclables, and leave the can out again on the next pick-up day.
2. For apartment owners, business owners and property managers, city inspectors will mail up to two warning notices before imposing a \$50 fine.
3. For self-haul customers at disposal stations, customers are asked to separate recyclables out before dumping their garbage.

The city can exempt properties from the policy if space limitations don't allow room for recycling containers. Publicly accessible trash cans such as at streets, parks, plazas and sports facilities are also exempt.

Multiple buildings on a single property may make it challenging to meet the goal of less than 10% recyclable materials in the trash. The city may work with these properties to find a reasonable amount of recyclables allowed in the trash while still upholding the purpose of the policy.

Hotels are not liable for the behavior of guests so long as the hotel provides instructions for the guests on the means of recycling, as well as the fact that paper and cardboard recycling is a requirement of the City of Seattle.

Results

In 2009 the city found that most recyclables were being recovered from homes and businesses, but the self-haul sector was lagging:

- nearly 80% of recyclable paper was being recycled at businesses
- 81% of containers and 88% of paper were recycled at homes
- 68% of paper and 57% of containers were recycled at multi-family properties
- 27% of paper was recycled from self-haul loads

Downloads

[Seattle Prohibition of Recyclables in Garbage](#)

More information

[Recycling Regulations in Seattle](#)

[Seattle Public Utilities Recycling webpage](#)

[Seattle Solid Waste Reports](#)

Waste360 article: "[Seattle Bans Yard Waste and Paper from Business Trash](#)"



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