



Massachusetts  
Department  
of  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION

# Setting up a Multi-Family or Apartment Building Recycling Program

## A 7-Step Guide

There are **seven basic steps** to planning and implementing a successful recycling program in an apartment or multifamily complex.

### #1 Designate a coordinator.

The coordinator can be anyone who wants to get involved. A landlord, property manager or maintenance person is often the best choice. These individuals are familiar with the waste management system and the residents, and are in the best positions to communicate with both haulers and residents to find out what will work and what will not. If there is a tenant association, a committee could also be involved in reviewing plans, implementing the program, and promoting participation.

### #2 Determine method of sorting and containers needed.

The next step is to determine how materials will be sorted and the number of containers needed to handle the quantity of recyclable materials that will be collected in your building. The materials you collect may depend on how much storage space is available, or what materials available haulers pick up. Often residents are required to separate their recyclables into at least two bins: mixed paper and commingled containers. Commingled collection combines plastic, aluminum, and steel/tin food and beverage containers into a single bin. Listed below are conversion factors for two common sizes of wheeled carts/bins that are commonly used in multi-family programs.

Size of wheeled cart or toter	Approximate weight of material each cart or toter will hold		Estimated number of units each cart or toter will serve (+)
	Mixed paper	Commingled containers	
<b>64 gallon size</b>	127 lbs	57 lbs	3-4 units
<b>96 gallon size</b>	190 lbs	86 lbs	4-5 units

(+) Estimated number of units served is based on an apartment with two people filling the equivalent of one 18-gallon container emptied weekly. Different people generate varying amounts of material based on their purchasing habits. Some programs may collect every two weeks. As a result, the number of containers needed will vary.

### #3 Arrange for pick-up.

Recycling services are rarely offered for free, but you should be able to renegotiate the total cost of collection services for trash and recyclables with your current waste hauler. Begin by checking your waste collection contract for any recycling-related terms, costs, and conditions. If your current trash hauler or maintenance staff does not collect and transport recyclables at a reasonable cost, try to contract with an independent recycling business to provide these services. Check the **Recycling Services Directory** (<http://www.state.ma.us/dep/recycle/rsd/rsd.htm>) or your local yellow pages to find a hauler who provides recycling.

Generally multi-family recycling programs may not generate large amounts of revenue for building owners, but if structured properly, a building's trash disposal costs can be reduced. Recycling companies may pay to collect or receive paper and/or commingled containers or will charge less to accept these materials than will a trash hauler disposing of them in a landfill or combustion facility.

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(617) 574-6872.



## Plan the storage and collection system.

**#4** Identify a location for the collection and storage systems. Be sure to take into account the wheeled cart or toter size needed, and consult with your maintenance staff and hauler to select carts or toters that are compatible with current waste collection procedures and practices, (i.e., material transfer and loading).

Haulers are usually able to provide necessary equipment, but it is possible that you will have to purchase the building's collection containers and/or storage equipment. If residents are directed to deposit their trash in outside containers (dumpsters, barrels, or totes), dedicated recycling containers should be located in the same general area. In buildings that use trash rooms or chutes, every effort should be made to position the recycling collection containers near trash collection locations. Your maintenance staff may need to transport recyclables to a central location for pick-up. If paper will be stored inside for more than a day, check with your local Fire Department for any specific requirements.

Be sure that the containers will be ready for use before starting your education and promotion efforts. After the program begins, you can expect bins to be full during the first few weeks, because some residents will start storing up materials as soon as they first learn about the new recycling program.

## Set up your collection and storage system and start the program.

**#5** Prior to launching the educational program, be sure that all the containers are in place, and reconfirm pick up arrangements with your hauler. Prior to the start-up of your program check one more time with maintenance staff to ensure they know what their responsibilities are during the first few weeks.

## Provide basic education.

**#6** Education of program participants should begin with posters or letters explaining the program, why it is being implemented, and when it will begin. This can be followed by a brochure or flyer that explains how, what, where, and when to recycle. These are best delivered along with recycling baskets/bins, if applicable. It is also a good idea to recruit volunteers from each apartment building or from each floor of the building to help announce the program, encourage cooperation, monitor the collection system, and answer questions from participants.

The Massachusetts DEP provides grants to municipalities for educational materials and containers for multi-family recycling programs. Information on these grants can be found on the DEP website at <http://www.state.ma.us/dep/recycle/cities.htm#grants>.

Signage should be posted near all collection locations. All instructional materials must be appropriate for the tenant's languages and literacy levels.

## #7

### Monitor program and provide follow-up services.

Recycling will significantly change how residents are expected to handle their trash, and they will need encouragement and reminders to establish these new habits. Try to resolve problems on an on-going basis. Many new programs experience a brief “shake-down” period. During this time, a coordinator (or another contact) must be available to answer questions from participants and troubleshoot operational issues.

On a regular basis, report back to the participants on their progress. Charting the quantities collected each month and publishing comparisons with previous months helps residents to appreciate the results of their efforts. Keep this information as timely and concise as possible. In some situations, reduced disposal bills can be converted into a more tangible incentive program. For example, let the residents know that the savings from recycling go towards upgrading shared facilities such as laundry rooms or lobby areas. Or, the savings might defer the need for rent increases.

Once in place, the recycling program will not require much time to coordinate. Your personnel will soon see recycling as just another part of their routine maintenance responsibilities. The benefits will continue for your apartment building, your bottom line, and the environment.

#### For more information:

- 1) Contact your municipal Department of Public Works (DPW) or Board of Health (BOH) to ask how apartment buildings, condominiums or other multi-family dwellings are serviced by your community.
- 2) Go to the web site of the Earth’s 911 organization at [www.cleanup.org](http://www.cleanup.org), and enter your 5-digit zip code to see a profile of a specific municipal recycling program. Please note that some cities and towns may not specifically list information on how they service multi-family buildings on this site.
- 3) Contact the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Municipal Waste Reduction Program for program information at (617) 556-1021 ([www.mass.gov/dep/recycle](http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle)).

#### Additional information on the web:

**A Model For Local Government Recycling and Waste Reduction**, California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB), go to: <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/LGLibrary/Innovations?MultiFamily/>.

**Multifamily Recycling: A National Study**. November 2001, published by US EPA, document #EPA530-R-01-018, available at: <http://wpa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/recycle/multifamily.pdf>.

**Apartment Recycling in Saint Paul**, Eureka Recycling, go to: <http://www.eureakrecycling.org/recycling/apartment.html>.

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