



# MULTI-FAMILY ZERO WASTE GUIDE

SECOND EDITION



GOVERNMENT OF THE  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
**MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR**



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# INTRODUCTION

The Multi-Family Zero Waste Guide from the DC Department of Public Works (DPW) supports multi-family apartment buildings, condominiums, and cooperatives in complying with the District's trash and recycling requirements. In addition to explaining the required recycling programs that buildings must maintain for their residents, this guide will also detail how waste can be reduced and reused in a multi-family setting and how buildings can elect to provide opportunities for residents to compost, recycle specialty materials, and properly dispose of hazardous waste. Maintaining successful recycling programs will help your building avoid fines for non-compliance and help the District reach its zero waste goal of 80% waste diversion.

## WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

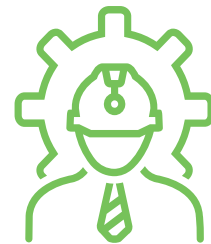
The Multi-Family Zero Waste Guide will be useful to numerous stakeholders involved in the multi-family building space, including:



**PROPERTY MANAGERS**



**BUILDING OWNERS**



**BUILDING ENGINEERS**



**FACILITIES WORKERS**



**JANITORIAL STAFF**



**RESIDENTS**



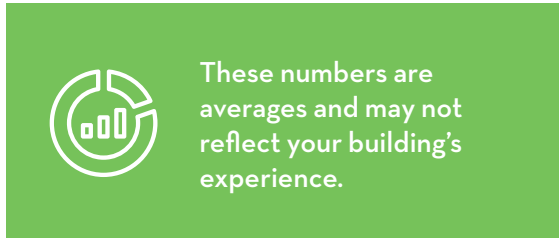
# EVALUATE YOUR WASTE

Knowing what's in your waste stream is an important first step to managing it. You can determine exactly what your multi-family building generates by conducting a waste audit and you can find resources to help you complete a waste audit on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Sustainable Materials Management page at [epa.gov/smm](https://www.epa.gov/smm).

However, you can get a very good approximation of what you should find in your waste stream by examining the District's estimates for what the average multi-family building produces. The average household living in a multi-family building generates 1,900 pounds of waste a year. This estimate can be multiplied by the number of units in your building to get a sense for how much waste is generated in total for both trash and recycling.

The District's estimates for how much recycling vs. trash is generated can also help you estimate how much of each kind of material needs to be collected. By weight, about half of the material that multi-family buildings produce is recyclable. Recycling takes up more space than trash does, as well. This information tells us that buildings that do a good job of collecting the recycling should have at least as many recycling containers as trash containers and have pick-up for recycling at least as frequently as pick-up for trash.

Most buildings today don't collect all of the recycling that residents produce. In fact, while more than half of waste generated by buildings is recyclable, only 12% of waste that's generated is actually recycled. As recycling improves in a building, more recycling containers and/or more frequent pick-up of recycling will be necessary. Conversely, fewer trash containers will be needed and frequency of trash pick-up may be able to be reduced. At a minimum, both trash and recycling are required to be picked up twice per week.



These numbers are averages and may not reflect your building's experience.

While the quantity of recycling that a building collects is important, so is the quality. The average multi-family building today collects recycling that is 26.5% contaminated with material that's not recyclable. Contamination makes recycling more difficult and expensive. If a building has high contamination, the building's hauler may charge more for recycling, levy a contamination fee, or reject loads of recycling.



## REDUCE YOUR WASTE

While it's important to manage waste once it's created in a sustainable manner, the biggest social, economic, and environmental impacts come from reducing waste generation in the first place. The less waste your multi-family building generates, the lower the cost will be to manage trash and recycling. Strategies to reduce your building's waste include:

- Suggest to residents that they unsubscribe from unwanted mailers and catalogues.
- Consider how your office can go paperless and reduce unneeded and costly printed collateral.
- Switch to reusable plates, cups, and utensils for resident events rather than using single-use food service-ware.
- Provide residents with reusable drinking containers to reduce the generation of plastic water bottles. If offering water to guests or prospective tenants, offer them water in reusable drinking glasses rather than water bottles.
- If you notice products that are routinely purchased for building management arrive over-packaged, tell your supplier that you are dissatisfied with the overpackaging and waste.
- Ask residents what they do to reduce their waste and promote good ideas with other residents.



## REUSE AND DONATE

Many items that we often dispose of after a single use can actually be used multiple times. The more items that can be kept in “circulation” through reuse or donation, the less material will be introduced into the waste system. The more your residents re-use and donate items, the less waste your multi-family building will need to manage. Ways your building can facilitate reuse and donation include:

- If you provide residents with an online platform to connect, encourage them to share when they have unwanted, sanitized items that others might want.
- Host monthly, quarterly, or annual swaps for residents. You can encourage residents to bring any item they don't have use for any more or have themed events where residents are asked to bring clothing, books, or a specific type of item.
- Make residents aware of swaps hosted by neighborhood organizations or that take place online. Check out Reuse DC's event page ([reuse.dc.gov/page/events-api](https://reuse.dc.gov/page/events-api)) for events happening in the DC Area.
- Organize a donation drive with an organization that will pick-up items from your building. Check out Reuse DC's list of donation pick-up services ([reuse.dc.gov/page/donation-pick-services](https://reuse.dc.gov/page/donation-pick-services)) for ideas.
- Suggest that residents offer perishable groceries to their neighbors before travelling, rather than throwing away items that would go bad while out of town.
- Encourage residents to repair items when broken by directing them to online videos explaining how to repair common items and by sharing events where residents can bring items for repair like the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) **Fix-It Events** ([doee.dc.gov/service/fix-it-dc](https://doee.dc.gov/service/fix-it-dc)). An online directory of repair businesses can be found on [DOEE's reuse.dc.gov](https://reuse.dc.gov).
- Let residents know about local second-hand and online stores where they can purchase used items and post items for sale or donation once they no-longer have use for them. DOEE's online directory [reuse.dc.gov/page/reuse-directory](https://reuse.dc.gov/page/reuse-directory) is one helpful resource to share with residents.
- Consider purchasing used items when outfitting common spaces in your multi-family building or replacing items. Browse fixtures, furniture, and decor from second-hand shops and antique stores, Craigslist, Ebay, Facebook Marketplace, and other online sources which can be found using [reuse.dc.gov](https://reuse.dc.gov).



# MANDATORY TRASH & RECYCLING REQUIREMENTS

Multi-family buildings must comply with all trash and recycling requirements for businesses and additional requirements specifically for the multi-family sector. DPW inspectors routinely visit buildings to ensure all requirements are being met. If a building fails to comply with a requirement, the building can receive violations with fines. Fines range from \$150 to \$500 for a first instance of non-compliance to greater than \$2,000 for a fourth instance of non-compliance within a 60-day period. A comprehensive list of multi-family building trash and recycling requirements is listed below.

## TRASH & RECYCLING HAULING

- Buildings must contract with a hauler for trash and recycling collection that is licensed by the Department of Licensing and Consumer Protection (DLCP) and that is registered with DPW's Office of Waste Diversion (OWD). A hauler that is only licensed by DLCP and that is not registered with OWD or a hauler that is only registered by OWD and not licensed by DLCP is not compliant.
- Trash and recycling must each be picked up at least two times every week, totaling a minimum of four pick-ups. Recycling being picked-up once per week is non-compliant and trash being picked-up once per week is non-compliant. If you feel that your building does not require twice a week pick-up for either trash or recycling, exemptions may be granted by OWD on a case-by-case basis and requests for exemptions can be made by emailing [zero.waste@dc.gov](mailto:zero.waste@dc.gov).
- Depending on your agreement with your hauler, recycling can either be collected "single-stream," with all recycling commingled, or it can also be collected "dual-stream," or by separating different kinds of recycling from one another. Common examples of dual stream recycling are collecting paper and cardboard separately from other containers, as well as collecting glass separately from other materials.



Shop around for a hauler that fits your needs

and the materials that your multi-family business generates. Businesses that receive quotes from multiple haulers are more likely to negotiate better pricing.

## TRASH & RECYCLING CONTAINERS

- A sufficient quantity and size of trash and recycling containers are required so that all material can be contained with lids closed. Overflowing trash or recycling, lids being pushed open, or trash and recycling littered around bins indicate that there are not enough containers of sufficient size and/or that pick-up must be more frequent.
- Containers may not have holes and may not have broken or missing lids. Containers need to be replaced periodically due to normal wear and tear. Haulers often provide trash and recycling containers as part of their hauling contract. It is ultimately the building's responsibility to ensure that containers are in good condition, so it is important to discuss with your hauler who is responsible for replacing unfit containers, how the replacement process will work, and what container repair or replacement fees might be incurred.
- Containers must display the hauler's name, phone number, and the size or capacity of each container.



## PLASTIC BAGS

- Plastic bags must be used to contain trash. Plastic bags containing trash can be any color or opacity.
- Plastic bags are highly discouraged for containing recycling. If plastic bags are used to contain recycling, they must be clear and transparent and cannot be opaque, colored, or black. Although the District currently permits clear plastic bags to be used to contain recycling, many haulers and recycling processors will not accept recycling contained in plastic bags.

## SIGNAGE & OUTREACH

- Multi-family buildings are required to post signage that includes information on what materials must be recycled and what materials must be placed in trash at each location where trash and recycling are stored or collected.
- Residents must be informed upon move-in and at least once annually with a written notice of the requirement to separate recycling from trash, what materials must be recycled, how and where recyclables will be taken for recycling, and the name and contact information of any recycling coordinator on the property.

## MATERIAL

- All of the materials listed in the [Mayor's List of Recyclables and Compostables \(dpw.dc.gov/recyclingcompostlist\)](#) must be recycled by multi-family buildings. This list can be updated during its biannual review or more frequently, so it is prudent to review the list periodically and ensure the list is aligned with your building's recycling program.
- There may not be recycling in the trash. There may not be trash contaminating the recycling.

## SOURCE SEPARATION PLAN

- Multi-family dwellings with 80 or more units, commercial buildings with 10 or more units, and businesses or nonprofit organizations with 101 or more employees must submit an annual source separation plan to DPW.
- The plan can be submitted at [zerowaste.dc.gov/page/ssp](#) by filling out an online form that includes information about how the building complies with the trash and recycling requirements listed above. Plans should be submitted annually by April 1 each year.
- DPW Recycling Outreach Specialists are available to help you fill out the plan and provide on-site verification to help your building stay in compliance.

Zero Waste DC provides resources that can help you comply with the signage and outreach requirements for multi-family buildings, including signs that can be posted in collection areas and flyers that can be used to educate residents about your recycling program upon move-in. Find resources at [zerowaste.dc.gov/page/resources-businesses](#).



## GLASS

Glass can be a challenging material to recycle when collected together with other materials, but it is required to be collected in recycling programs. Some haulers may not accept glass for recycling in their single-stream recycling collection services. If the hauler your building contracts with does not accept glass, it is necessary to offer residents glass collection with another hauler or recycling service.



# HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE & SPECIAL MATERIALS

Many materials are prohibited from trash and recycling, such as household hazardous waste, electronics, and batteries. To ensure these materials are not placed in trash and recycling bins, it is important to communicate to residents how these items must be managed. Other materials, such as furniture and mattresses are not legally prohibited from the trash, but are not suited for normal trash and recycling collection. Haulers may require that both household hazardous waste and items unfit for normal trash and recycling collection are excluded from their trash and recycling services.

## MANDATORY SPECIAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

Household hazardous waste, electronics, and batteries cannot be collected in normal trash and recycling programs. To ensure they are kept out of a building's trash and recycling program, buildings can provide residents with a dedicated collection program and promote drop-off programs for these materials. The building is ultimately responsible for ensuring that household hazardous waste and electronics are not present in trash and recycling collection.

**HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE:** Household hazardous waste is generally considered waste that is corrosive, flammable, reactive, or toxic that can negatively impact human or environmental health. Common types of household hazardous waste include items such as light bulbs, rat poison, and paint. A more robust, but not all-encompassing, list can be viewed at [dpw.dc.gov/node/466802](https://dpw.dc.gov/node/466802). Fines for household hazardous waste being present in normal trash and recycling range from \$150 to \$2,000. Many trash and recycling haulers can provide the additional service of separate collection for household hazardous waste. Your building can also encourage residents to bring their household hazardous waste items to the District's Special Waste Collection Events to safely dispose of their household hazardous waste. For dates and locations, visit [dpw.dc.gov](https://dpw.dc.gov).

Leftover paint can be recycled and reused. Organize a building wide collection of leftover paint and get it picked-up for free by [PaintCare \(paintcare.org/states/district-of-columbia/\)](https://paintcare.org/states/district-of-columbia/). Some retail paint and hardware stores in the District also accept paint for recycling. Check out PaintCare's site locator map ([paintcare.org/drop-off-sites/](https://paintcare.org/drop-off-sites/)) to find a drop-off site or event.

**ELECTRONICS:** Some haulers provide dedicated electronics collection. Haulers that are eStewards or R2 Certified are best qualified to collect and manage electronic waste. Opportunities for electronics drop-off can be promoted to residents as well:

- Bring electronics to DOEE's [eCYCLE \(doee.dc.gov/ecycle\)](https://doee.dc.gov/ecycle) collection events, which take place quarterly in each Ward and are free and open to the public, or to DPW's [Special Waste Collection Events](#), open to all District residents. More information about the dates and locations for these events can be found at [dpw.dc.gov](https://dpw.dc.gov).
- Bring electronics to electronics retailers with special recycling programs. Not all retailers accept all electronics; please call the retailer to confirm.
- Mail back electronics to the original equipment manufacturer if a program is available.

**BATTERIES:** Batteries can cause fires in trash and recycling facilities and are important to dispose of safely. It is illegal to dispose of single-use and rechargeable household batteries in the trash or recycling. Buildings should tell residents to bring all batteries to the numerous [public drop-offs](#) ([call2recycle.org/locator/](http://call2recycle.org/locator/)) available or to the [District's Special Waste Collection Events](#) ([dpw.dc.gov](http://dpw.dc.gov)).

## VOLUNTARY SPECIAL MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

While not legally required to be collected separately from trash and recycling, bulk waste can be highly problematic in normal trash and recycling, and should be collected separately. Many haulers may require you to manage bulk waste separately from the normal trash and recycling services they provide.

**BULK WASTE:** Bulk waste includes items such as furniture, mattresses, and appliances whose size makes them problematic for collection in trucks that are designed to manage household waste. Many buildings set up dedicated bulk collection on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis as a value-added service to residents. This can be beneficial to residents who are moving, so buildings often align bulk collection with the dates residents frequently move in or out. Providing ongoing bulk collection can help reduce recycling contamination, mitigate illegal dumping issues at your property, and reduce incidence of residents trying to jam large items unfit for trash rooms or chutes that can necessitate costly repairs. Buildings can also suggest that residents bring bulk items to the District's [Fort Totten Transfer Station](#) ([dpw.dc.gov/service/fort-totten-transfer-station](http://dpw.dc.gov/service/fort-totten-transfer-station)). Bulk pick-up via 311 is unavailable to residents of multi-family buildings.

If bulky items like furniture and appliances are still usable, consider donating them to be reused before putting them in the bulk trash pile. Donation and reuse options can be found by visiting [reuse.dc.gov](http://reuse.dc.gov).





# VOLUNTARY ORGANICS MANAGEMENT

Multi-family buildings in the District are not currently required to collect organics such as food and yard waste, but buildings can voluntarily organize collection with the multiple haulers in the District that specialize in collecting organics. In addition to establishing an organics collection program in your building, you can also empower residents to set up a subscription with an organics hauler themselves for their unit and share information about drop-off and cooperative organics programs. To support voluntary organics diversion, your building can take the following actions.

## 1. ORGANIZE ORGANICS COLLECTION FOR THE BUILDING

No matter the size of your multi-family building, organics collection can be organized to divert the food and yard waste generated by your residents. Many buildings in the District currently offer organics collections as a value-added service to residents as a way of emphasizing their commitment to sustainability and to set their building apart. When starting a new organics program, it is important to communicate to residents where they must go to dispose of their organics and what kinds of materials are accepted by your organics program. Providing kitchen caddies and/or compostable bags for residents to collect organics can be helpful.

**HAULING ORGANICS:** Organics must be picked-up by a hauler at least twice each week. Haulers that transport organics, as with any kind of solid waste, must be both registered with DLCP and DPW’s Office of Waste Diversion. Some haulers that transport trash and recycling may also be able to haul organics from your building, but there are also dedicated haulers that provide exclusively organics collection services in the District.

**ORGANICS BINS:** An organics hauler can often make recommendations on the container size and what level of service would make sense for your building. Bins that are compliant for trash and recycling collection are also appropriate for organics collection. It is helpful to ensure that organics bins are a different color than your trash and recycling bins to help residents differentiate bins from one another and it is required that bins are labeled for “food waste,” “organics,” “compost,” “compostables,” or a similar term. Most buildings and organics haulers opt for organics bins that are brown or orange. Organics containers may not have holes and may not have broken or missing lids. Containers for organics must also display the hauler’s name, phone number, and size of the container.

**ORGANICS BIN PLACEMENT:** Containers for organics collection should be co-located with trash and recycling bins, wherever trash and recycling bins are located. Many buildings with trash rooms on each floor will have organics collected in bins in each trash room. Some newly constructed multi-family buildings design a three-chute system, one for trash, one for recycling, and another for organics. Other buildings that aren’t able to fit full organics bins in each trash room or want to start small will often place organics bins in their lobby, parking garage, or loading dock for communal use by all residents.

**ORGANICS SIGNAGE:** Signage explaining what kinds of organic materials are accepted must be posted at each location where organics are collected. Your organics hauler likely has specific requirements for what kinds of food and/or yard waste they accept, so it is important that the signage reflects their accepted materials list.

## 2. ALLOW RESIDENTS TO ORGANIZE THEIR OWN ORGANICS COLLECTION

Many organics haulers are willing to work with individual households within a multi-family building that would like to set up a private subscription service and collect material in small containers like 5 gallon buckets. Organics haulers may be able to collect an individual household's organics container from their door or from the building's lobby. Your building can proactively communicate to residents that if they would like to organize their own organics collection, they would be permitted to do so.

## 3. DIRECT RESIDENTS TO THE DISTRICT'S FOOD WASTE DROP-OFF SITES

Residents can bring food waste to one of the many [Food Waste Drop-Offs](https://zerowaste.dc.gov/foodwastedropoff) ([zerowaste.dc.gov/foodwastedropoff](https://zerowaste.dc.gov/foodwastedropoff)) operated by DPW throughout all eight wards. Let residents know which Food Waste Drop-Off is closest to them and recommend they bring accepted food waste.

## 4. ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO JOIN A DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION (DPR) COMMUNITY COMPOST SITE

DPR's hosts more than 50 community compost sites ([dpr.dc.gov/page/community-compost-cooperative-network](https://dpr.dc.gov/page/community-compost-cooperative-network)). Identify the closest to your building and encourage residents to join so they can compost their own food scraps and participate in local composting efforts.





# COMMON VIOLATIONS

Being aware of the most common trash and recycling violations can help you avoid fines and stay in compliance.



## 1. PICK-UP FREQUENCY

At a minimum, multi-family buildings are required to have trash and recycling each picked-up at least twice per week. Common violations include having pick-up for trash only once a week and/or recycling only once a week. Fines for non-compliance range from \$500 to \$4,000.



## 2. OVERFLOWING BINS

All material must be contained in bins with their lids closed and no material around the exterior of the bin (with the exception of stacked, flattened cardboard). Fines for non-compliance range from \$150 to \$2,000.



## 3. FAILURE TO SEPARATE TRASH AND RECYCLING

Items that should be placed in the trash must be placed in the trash and cannot contaminate recycling. Likewise, recycling must not be in trash bins. Fines for non-compliance range from \$200 to \$3,000.



## 4. FAILURE TO POST SIGNS

Signs explaining what can be placed in the trash and what can be placed in recycling must be posted at each location where trash and recycling is stored or collected. Fines for non-compliance range from \$200 to \$3,000.



## 5. DAMAGED BINS

Bins must be in good condition with no holes, broken components, or missing lids. Fines for non-compliance range from \$150 to \$2,000.



# CONTACT DPW AND THE OFFICE OF WASTE DIVERSION

For general inquiries, please visit DC Zero Waste's website at [zerowaste.dc.gov](https://zerowaste.dc.gov) or email [zero.waste@dc.gov](mailto:zero.waste@dc.gov).

For questions and inquiries related to trash, recycling, or organics for multi-family buildings, please visit [zerowaste.dc.gov/page/businesses](https://zerowaste.dc.gov/page/businesses) or email [zero.waste@dc.gov](mailto:zero.waste@dc.gov) attention "Multi-family."

To request a presentation on trash, recycling, and organics requirements for multi-family buildings, please email [zero.waste@dc.gov](mailto:zero.waste@dc.gov) attention "Multi-family." In-person and virtual training is available to explain trash and recycling requirements, best practices, and ways your building can avoid violations. Training is given by DPW staff and availability varies.