

Rate application includes incentives to recycle and compost and new programs to boost diversion at apartment buildings

A proposal to upgrade San Francisco's 16-year-old recycling and composting collection program is before the City.

The plan, submitted by Recology, San Francisco's recycling collection and processing company, seeks funding for key programs, including:

- New wing on transfer station to receive compostable material
- Redesigned routes including re-purposed and new trucks, and new sized trash and recycling bins
- New 5-year labor agreement
- Increased landfill disposal costs.

For apartment buildings with six or more units, but fewer than 600 rooms, three changes are proposed:

1. The charge for 32 gallons of bin capacity is proposed to go from \$25.90 per collection to \$24.50, a decrease of 5.4 percent.
2. The monthly dwelling unit charge is proposed to go from \$5.16 cents to \$5, a decrease of 3.1 percent.
3. The biggest change proposed for apartment buildings concerns the parameters for the diversion discount, a cost reduction based a building's recycling rate.

The rates noted in points 1 and 2 above are for Monday through Friday curbside collection. Apartment buildings that ask Recology to provide inside collection service pay additional costs such as key, distance, and elevation charges.

In 2009 the Board of Supervisors passed the Mandatory Recycling Ordinance requiring all properties to participate in San Francisco's recycling and composting collection programs. The City feels all buildings should divert a minimum of 25 percent their waste. Accordingly, it is proposed that the first 25 percent of the volumetric charge be fixed. This would be an increase from the 10 percent fixed charge implemented in the City's Refuse Rate Order of 2013.

At that time the diversion discount for apartment buildings was capped at 75 percent. Under the current rate proposal, the cap would go away. If approved, that change will allow an apartment building to qualify for a larger diversion discount once its exceeds the 25 percent minimum for recycling and composting more of its discards.

San Francisco is home to 9,500 apartment buildings. Virtually all of those buildings can recycle and compost a lot more of their waste.

The average apartment building subscribes to 423 gallons of garbage service and 416 gallons of recycling service per week, but only 54 gallons of composting collection service. This is why apartment buildings constitute one of the lowest-performing sectors for diversion.

Garbage bins at apartment buildings often contain a lot of materials that could be recycled. And because apartment buildings are undersubscribed for composting collection service, trash bins in these buildings usually contain a lot of materials that should instead be composted.

The overall recycling rate at apartment buildings has hovered at about 53 percent for three years. Over the same period the recycling rate at commercial properties has steadily increased. It now stands at 56.8 percent, and the commercial sector is on track to exceed 60 percent diversion in the near future.

For the apartment sector composting bins account for 6 percent of overall container volume. In the commercial sector composting bins account for 20 percent of volume. There are many actions that apartment building owners and managers and recycling specialists employed by Recology and the City can undertake together to address this imbalance and help buildings increase their diversion discount.

Recology will host workshops in June for apartment building owners and managers to help people adjust services in ways that boost recycling and reduce disposal. We can also provide assistance on the phone and can visit your site.

One key is adjusting bin sizes to reduce disposal and increase recycling and composting.

Another key is to make recycling and composting easy and convenient for tenants and to help tenants better understand why it is important to recycle and compost. To help owners and managers address these matters, the proposal before the City includes new robust programs specifically for apartment buildings.

The Facility Management and Infrastructure Program will include:

- Commencing appropriate service levels at new buildings to provide ample capacity for diversion.
- Communicating the requirements of the Mandatory Recycling and Composting Ordinance to property management.
- Installing signage and internal bins to improve resident access where necessary.
- Where applicable, closing trash chutes or converting trash chutes to recycling chutes.
- Conducting training for facility and maintenance staff, focusing on contamination identification and the importance of proper labeling.

The Tenant Engagement and Education Program will include:

- Outreach material, including a welcome packet for tenants.
- Delivery of composting kitchen pails with instructions on pail usage.
- Email blasts and postal mailings for property management to distribute to tenants.
- Waste Zero Ambassadors at each building, responsible for motivating their neighbors to sort properly. The ambassadors will be eligible for a monthly stipend or donation to a charity and, if they agree, will be highlighted on the Recology website.
- Implementation of a social media group platform to facilitate tenant discussions and engagement. The platform could be used to offer incentives for diversion, encouraging friendly competition among tenants.

Recology submitted a draft proposal to the City in December. The formal proposal is now before SF Public Works, which will hold public hearings in March and April. The SF Rate Payer Advocate and company representatives are attending community meetings to discuss the proposal including facility and service improvements.

More information is posted at: Recology.com/sfrates