

# Seattle Composting Requirement Frequently Asked Questions

*Updated 9/23/14\**

*\*On September 22, 2014, the Seattle City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting food from Seattle's residential and commercial garbage.*

## **Why is Seattle prohibiting food from the garbage?**

Seattle sends approximately 100,000 tons of food waste 300 miles to a landfill in Eastern Oregon each year, resulting in higher costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

Based on the success of Seattle's existing recycling and yard waste ordinances, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) projects that the food waste law will divert 38,000 tons of food scraps from the landfill via composting, thus helping the city achieve its goal of recycling and composting 60 percent of its waste by 2015.

## **When does Seattle's composting requirement ordinance take effect?**

SPU will begin an education campaign in October, 2014. Food waste would be prohibited from commercial and residential garbage beginning January 1, 2015. SPU would start enforcing the law on July 1, 2015.

## **What items are prohibited from the garbage under the composting requirement ordinance?**

Recyclable items, such as paper, uncontaminated cardboard, bottles, cups, jars and cans are currently prohibited from the garbage. Starting January 1, 2015, no food and compostable paper, including food-contaminated cardboard, paper napkins and paper towels, would be allowed in the garbage.

## **How is Seattle enforcing this composting requirement ordinance?**

Starting January 1, 2015, all commercial establishments that generate food waste or compostable paper would have to subscribe to a composting service, compost their food waste on-site, or self-haul their food waste for processing. (Single-family and apartments are already required to have composting service.)

As of July 1, 2015 all commercial, single-family and multi-family garbage containers that would be found to contain more than 10 percent recyclables or food waste by volume would face penalties of Seattle municipal code.

Single-family properties whose garbage contains more than more than 10 percent recyclables or food waste by volume would receive a notice on their garbage container and a \$1 fine would be levied on their bi-monthly garbage bill.

Multi-family and commercial properties whose garbage contains more than 10 percent recyclables or food waste by volume would receive a warning notice. Upon the third notice, the property would receive a \$50 fine.

### **Doesn't Seattle already prohibit food and recyclables from the garbage?**

Seattle prohibited yard waste from the garbage in 1988.

Seattle prohibited recyclables from the garbage in 2005.

Seattle began curbside food waste collection in 2005.

In 2009, Seattle required all residential properties to either subscribe to food and yard waste collection or participate in backyard composting. Seattle businesses that have customer dining area disposal stations where customers discard single use packaging must collect recyclable and compostable packaging in clearly labeled bins and send it to a recycling or composting facility for processing.

Since late 2011 multi-family buildings have been required to provide compost collection service for their residents.

More than 300,000 commercial, single-family and multi-family units participate in food waste collection. SPU estimates that businesses and residents have diverted nearly 400,000 tons of food from the landfill since 2005.

### **How do Seattle residents feel about this requirement?**

In a recent survey, 74% supported it and 11% opposed it.

### **What affect have Seattle's recycling and composting laws had on the city's recycling rate?**

From 2003 to 2013, the amount of compostable and recyclable material that Seattle has diverted from the landfill each year has increased from 38.2 percent to 56.2 percent, or 407,125 tons a year. However, the growth of recycling has slowed down in recent years. This composting requirement is a necessary step to meeting our recycling goals.

### **Will businesses be held accountable if their customers or the general public put food in their garbage?**

Public litter cans would exempt from the ordinance.

Garbage containers in customer dining areas would be exempt from the ordinance when a business provides containers for food waste collection.

**What will happen to the food that is collected?**

Seattle sends more than 125,000 tons of food and yard waste to composting processors, where it is turned into compost for local parks and gardens.

**Won't food waste collection make a mess and attract pests?**

Like garbage, food waste is collected at least once a week from commercial and residential properties, thus minimizing vector issues. Businesses and residents currently utilize compostable bags and other compost containers in their kitchens to further reduce pests and odors.

**How can I get help starting food waste collection?**

Seattle Public Utilities offers free assistance to businesses and residents to help them recycle and compost, including providing education materials in multiple languages. Visit [www.seattle.gov/util](http://www.seattle.gov/util) or call **(206) 684-3000**.

**Will food waste collection save me money?**

Normally customers that divert a high percentage of their food waste to composting can reduce their overall solid waste bill.

**Do any other cities have similar laws?**

Seattle is the latest of several cities that have passed food waste requirements, including Vancouver, BC, Portland, OR, San Francisco, CA, and New York, NY.