

Business Recycling Requirements Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: October 8, 2008

Metro works with 25 cities and three counties of the Portland metropolitan area to meet the region's recycling and waste reduction goals. The Business Recycling Requirements program is intended to help move our region's successful recycling efforts to a higher level. Frequently asked questions on the program are detailed below.

BACKGROUND

Q: What is the issue?

A: Although many businesses recycle, an estimated 14 percent do not recycle or recycle only cardboard. As a result, more than 100,000 tons of recyclable resources (paper and containers) from this sector are disposed of annually. To reach the state-mandated waste reduction goal, businesses must recycle an additional 80,000 tons of paper and containers.

Q: Why not provide businesses with incentives to recycle more?

A: There are many current incentives for businesses to recycle, including the following:

- Free education, technical assistance, and resources provided by the regional Recycle at Work program.
- State law prohibiting garbage haulers from charging more for garbage and recycling services than for garbage alone.
- Volume-based rates, allowing customers to pay less when they generate less.
- Recognition programs to spotlight businesses doing well.
- Stable infrastructure to collect, transport, sort and recycle materials.

Incentives such as hauler or business payments to increase recycling have not been considered. They would ultimately be paid for by all businesses via collection rates.

Q: What are the benefits of increasing business recycling?

A: Business recycling requirements will lead to material supply for local recycling companies, increased environmental benefits, potential cost savings for businesses and consistency of recycling services across the region.

With the program's goal to recover approximately 80,000 tons of recyclable paper and containers currently sent to landfills, the newly recovered material largely would serve as manufacturing feedstock and supply local mills. Nationwide, the Northwest is among the few remaining areas that still have paper mills. Currently, paper collected in the Metro region provides less than 11 percent of the total paper mill needs; the rest must be shipped in from outside the region.

The environmental benefits from this program would prove significant. Recycling eligible paper and containers that otherwise would head for landfill disposal would (1) yield a reduction in greenhouse gases and energy consumption and (2) increase natural-resource savings. Specifically, recycling an additional 80,000 tons of paper and containers each year brings significant savings:

- Greenhouse gas emissions savings of 218,000 tons of carbon-dioxide equivalent.
- Greenhouse gas emissions reductions equivalent to nearly 42,000 cars driving in one year.
- +1.3 trillion British Thermal Units of energy savings – enough to power nearly 15,000 homes for one year.
- The equivalent of nearly 1.2 million trees a year – almost 1.2 Forest Parks.

Metro staff estimates the net environmental benefits of the business recycling requirements program to be \$10.22 million for 80,000 tons of additional recovery.

As a business diverts recyclable materials from the garbage, they may see savings in disposal costs. Some businesses also may generate income by selling recyclable paper, depending on the quantity and quality of the material.

The proposal would provide a consistent regional standard and level playing field for all businesses to recycle the same basic materials. Currently, inconsistent requirements and services offered can result in confusion and frustration within the business sector.

Q: What services are currently being offered to businesses?

A: Recycle at Work provides free resources and on-site technical assistance customized to each business's needs, including:

- **Program setup.**
- **Space planning**, including identifying solutions to space constraints and ensuring recycling bins are conveniently located.
- **Communication**, including staff training, signage and prompts. Recycle at Work also communicates with haulers, janitorial staff, property managers and decision-makers.
- **Invoice interpretation**, to help businesses (1) understand their garbage/recycling bill and the services available and (2) communicate more effectively with their hauler.
- **Containers**, including free deskside and central-area recycling collection containers and other tools.
- **Technical support**, including ongoing assistance from recycling specialists.

Q: What are the results of current services and programs?

A: Since Recycle at Work began in 2000, its 10 recycling specialists have:

- Provided on-site technical assistance to more than 1,000 businesses each year. Businesses and business partners have rated Recycle at Work highly for its quality of technical assistance.
- Distributed 50,000 recycling containers since 2003.
- Helped institute local business recognition programs.

Q: Who partners with the Recycle at Work program?

A: Metro and local governments' Recycle at Work program relies on partnerships with more than 20 business associations throughout the region. Metro plays an active role on the Building Owners and Managers Association education committee, helping bring recycling tools and knowledge to property managers, janitorial firms and building owners. In addition, local governments participate in local chamber of commerce events to connect with the business community. The Recycle at Work group also collaborates with the Oregon Lodging Association, Travel Portland, Columbia Corridor Association, Portland Metropolitan Association of Realtors, Oregon Lawyers for a Sustainable Future, Portland Development Commission, and the Sustainable Business Network to educate their members and offer free resources and assistance.

Q: What are current challenges for the Recycle at Work program?

A:

- Some businesses, not wanting to start their own recycling program, decline Recycle at Work's free services.
- Inconsistent regionwide recycling services.
- Limited information on businesses needing help with recycling.

PROGRAM

Q. What is the program?

A: The new program, Business Recycling Requirements, requires local businesses to recycle all types of paper and certain containers such as plastic bottles, aluminum cans and glass. Because most businesses already recycle, this requirement would simply formalize such practices.

For those businesses that do not currently recycle, the requirement asks that they recycle the same items residents already recycle at home. And to help businesses recycle, local governments will continue providing education and technical assistance through the Recycle at Work program.

Q: How does a business comply?

A: Generally, a business or building would comply by doing the following:

- Provide all tenants, employees and or guests with recycling containers for recyclable paper and containers
- Provide visible and correct signage to educate employees.
- Recycle its paper and containers.

Q: Would enforcement of the ordinance include fines?

A: Each local government can establish its own compliance program or enter into an agreement allowing Metro to perform the compliance function. The purpose of the requirement is not to punish businesses, but rather to encourage positive recycling practices. The City of Portland, for example, launched recycling requirements in 1996 and has since issued only three fines.

Q: The City of Portland already has a required program. Will Portland businesses be subject to two different sets of recycling requirements, inspections and potential penalties?

A: No. The City of Portland's program meets the terms of Metro's proposed requirements.

Q: How does the proposed program affect the local governments?

A:

- Local governments must enact a business recycling ordinance if they do not already have one.
- **Increased funding.** Metro will provide an additional \$400,000 pool of funds to be shared by the jurisdictions for implementation.
- **Minimal additional staffing and reporting.** Inherent within their jurisdictional authority over waste collection, local governments may spend staff time notifying businesses of the requirements, responding to customers and enforcing the ordinance. Local governments may elect to have Metro enforce the ordinance on their behalf. If the local governments choose to enforce the ordinance and/or accept additional funds for technical-assistance staff, they will be required to report results to Metro.
- **Increased delivery of services.** Currently, Recycle at Work staff from local governments spend up to 40 percent of their time trying to "get in the door" at businesses. This leaves only 60 percent of staff time available to help businesses improve their recycling. Recycling requirements would increase the amount of staff time available to further assist businesses in their recycling efforts.

Q: How will increased recycling impact businesses?

A: For most businesses, the program would require employees to recycle additional items in current recycling containers. Internal recycling containers are provided free by Recycle at Work. For some businesses, the program may require businesses to change their level of garbage service and acquire additional recycling containers. Volume-based rates may provide cost savings with more recycling and outdoor recycling containers are provided as a part of your garbage rate.

Q: Where do I go for help in setting up my workplace recycling program?

A: To receive assistance from the Recycle at Work program, contact Metro at 503-234-3000 or visit www.RecycleAtWork.com.

FEEDBACK

Q: How can I provide feedback regarding the proposed recycling requirements?

A: Metro would appreciate your feedback, and staff are available to answer questions or provide further assistance. For more information, visit www.oregonmetro.gov/businessrequirements or contact Marta McGuire, senior planner, at 503-797-1806.