

CHAPTER 9

MATERIALS IN MULTIFAMILY COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the diverse world of multifamily recycling!

In the Curbside and Beyond chapter we learned about curbside collection for one to four unit properties as well as best practices that are universal no matter what type of housing you live in. This chapter will focus on the collections systems for multifamily settings, which are defined as five units or more. The chapter will also explore some challenges unique to multifamily properties and strategies that tenants, property managers, local jurisdictions and Master Recyclers can use to address these challenges.

Multifamily communities come in many shapes and sizes: they may be made up of multiple buildings on a single tax lot, a single structure with multiple units, or a property with commercial space on the first floor and housing above. In some parts of the region, micro-apartments with communal spaces are also popping up. Some properties may include five units while others may have 200 or more households. Multifamily housing can include these types of properties:

- Condominiums
- Townhouses
- Apartments
- Moorages
- Manufactured home parks
- College dormitories
- Senior living facilities
- Co-housing communities

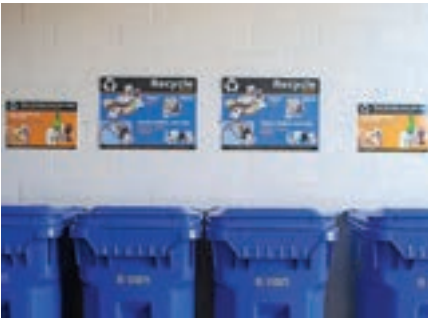




Almost half of the residents in the metropolitan region live in multifamily communities. Portland's 5,000 multifamily communities house 40 percent of its population. Washington County's 775 properties house 30 percent of the population, while Beaverton's 264 multifamily communities house 50 percent of the population. In Clackamas County, 25 percent of the population lives in multifamily housing, but in some of its cities the percentages are higher with Lake Oswego at 31 percent, Milwaukie at 41 percent, and Wilsonville at 59 percent.

And this population is growing! In 2014, 80 percent of construction permits in Portland were for multifamily buildings. In Washington County multifamily households increased by 12 percent between 2014 and 2016.

Clearly, with this many people living in multifamily communities, ensuring good recovery programs for this type of housing can have significant impacts.



MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTS AND RECYCLING SYSTEMS

Curbside collection for single family homes can be uniform throughout a jurisdiction because the housing is fairly uniform. Multifamily housing includes a great variety of settings and so the way in which garbage and recycling is stored and collected varies from site to site.

Moreover, multifamily properties typically involve a number of stakeholders. With single family properties, usually the decision maker is the property owner or the renter. With multifamily communities there may be a number of extra players that may affect services. There may be a property manager who manages the bills and communicates with the garbage and recycling company. There may be a homeowner's association that sets rules about container enclosures or pickup services to ensure a specific aesthetic. In some cases such as in dormitories and senior living facilities there are also staff or custodians.

Such a variety of building structures and multiple stakeholders present a situation in which each community needs to be evaluated individually.

Collection services for multifamily communities are generally considered to be commercial accounts by the collection companies and the jurisdictions in which they are located. Except in Portland, the franchise or certificate system dictates which collection company is available to the multifamily community. In Portland, commercial accounts are set up individually, with the property owner choosing a garbage and recycling company based on cost and services provided.

Regardless of which commercial garbage and recycling service a multifamily community uses, the local governments (and thus the haulers that provide the collection service on behalf of the local governments) are responsible for providing recycling services according to Oregon State Law ORS459, ORS459A. In addition, the property managers are responsible for providing residents the opportunity to recycle per Oregon State law ORS 90.318.

Portland and Beaverton have gone one step further to directly require landlords to provide recycling services to their residents through local ordinance. Although other local governments may not have a local ordinance requiring landlords to provide recycling services, they often have adopted rules or code language that requires the haulers to provide recycling services to their multifamily customers. The combination of these hauler requirements and local government assistance programs allows multifamily managers to easily set up a recycling system that works for their community.

On-site collection systems also vary. Most communities use shared garbage and recycling areas with dumpsters and carts or even a compactor. Some multifamily housing has individual carts assigned to each unit. This is often found in single level settings such as manufactured home parks, townhomes and courtyard apartments.

Although collection equipment may vary, the recycling program is the same in multifamily communities as in single-family homes with:

- Mixed recycling containers for paper, cardboard, metals and plastic.
- Containers for glass jars and bottles.

This is also known as a *two-sort* system and can be provided at all multifamily settings regardless of the garbage and recycling company used. Ideally, recycling bins are located near all garbage bins.

Unlike one to four unit properties, motor oil is not collected in multifamily settings. Yard debris is optional and usually not part of the collection system because most multifamily settings utilize landscaping companies that haul yard clippings when necessary. We will discuss how this affects renters' ability to collect food scraps for composting in a later section.

Nearly 90 percent of the region's multifamily households report that they recycle most of the time. So while one of the biggest self-identified challenges from property managers is better recycling, it isn't so much a question of getting residents to recycle, as it is assisting property managers with setting up their systems so they are easy to use. After that it is to recycle correctly.



OPPORTUNITIES

Examining barriers to recycling can be an excellent first step in discovering opportunities for change and improvement. So, what prevents multifamily residents from recycling correctly and consistently?

If you build it they will come and recycle

As we learned in the Behavior Change chapter some barriers to recycling may be very real physical ones. In multifamily settings the most common barriers are physical or structural. Some multifamily communities were built long before recycling was a standard expectation and therefore the enclosures are only designed to have space for garbage collection. This often means that recycling is squeezed in the back of the space, set outside the space or in a completely different building. Some buildings in the region even still have garbage chutes. Recycling must then be carried to a separate location. Cities for the most part, have updated their building requirements to address these problems in newer buildings.

Along with enclosure problems, property managers often do not know how many cubic yards of garbage and recycling is appropriate for their property. A site visit and advice from the multifamily specialist listed later in this chapter can help to overcome these barriers.

Location, location, location

We have learned that the buddy system where garbage and recycling are equally easy to access is an important strategy for ensuring that people recycle. Space inside some multifamily kitchens makes multiple containers for sorting more challenging. Often garbage collection is provided in multiple locations that are easy to access. Meanwhile, recycling containers may be in just one location and less accessible.



This creates a disincentive to recycle as tenants must transport their recyclables to this location. Unfortunately, they often opt to place recycling in a plastic bag which they then place in the recycling container which we have learned is a major problem for recycling processing facilities. Many local jurisdictions now provide durable, light-weight bags as part of their multifamily outreach efforts.

Common ground and social norms

Living in a multifamily community means living a shared life: shared walls, outdoor spaces, parking areas, and garbage and recycling areas. Frequently, residents share other resources as well including water, heat and other utility bills. This collective setting can be a benefit and a barrier to improving recycling. Individuals don't always see the rewards and benefits of preventing waste or conserving water when their personal bills are not significantly affected. However you can improve the recycling situation for hundreds of households at one time. Residents also often know each other, have established lines of communication and can build momentum for new recycling efforts.

Usually the central figure in these communities is the property manager. A property manager can take the lead in educating residents about recycling and sustainable practices and communicate the community expectations from the moment residents apply for housing or purchase a unit. Property managers can thus establish norms about recycling and common space. Working with a group of committed residents, facilitating a green team or working with the property management company to affect behavior change can be a wonderful opportunity for Master Recyclers.



Communication

Poor or out-of-date signage is a common problem that prevents successful recycling even for residents who want to do the right thing.

More people who live in multifamily communities will be linguistically isolated or speak English as a second language. Children who do not yet read, or are not tall enough to see signs, are often the ones tasked with taking out the garbage and recycling. The multifamily programs in the region have all designed signage, brochures and webpages with more pictures than words, color coding, and instructions on good sign placement.

Revolving doors

Another obstacle can arise in communities with high turnover, whether in management, ownership and/or residents. Residents who live in multifamily settings tend to move more often and be the newest members of a community. This may mean that they come with a lack of prior experience living in a city or they know a different recycling system. A constant revolving door at the front office or in management can create inconsistencies and shifts of priorities. Adopting a multifamily community by creating links between the property managers, the garbage and recycling company, and residents is a great way for a Master Recycler to make a difference.

SPECIAL MATERIALS CHALLENGES

Multifamily settings, much like single-family residences, face a number of challenges related to special materials. Fortunately there are resources designed to meet these challenges.

Hazardous waste disposal: Pesticides, batteries, paint thinners and fluorescent light bulbs don't go in the garbage. *Ask Metro* signage is available that tells people to call the Metro Recycling Information Center at 503-234-3000 about hazardous waste collection events and other options for safe disposal. This can help avoid accumulation of these items in waste enclosures. Some property managers will also provide a location for these items and regular pickup in order to avoid improper disposal.

Electronics: Landfills do not accept electronics. The Oregon E-cycles program will provide tenants and property managers information about the nearest location that provides free recycling of computers, monitors and televisions, keyboards, computers and mice.

Holiday waste reduction and tree disposal: Properties can coordinate holiday tree pickup and recycling with Boy and Girl Scout troops and other civic minded groups. Winter is a great time for Master Recycling outreach at community events and multifamily resident meetings with a focus on waste reduction and tree collection! The Metro Recycling Information Center will also provide information about how to reach groups collecting trees.

Bulky waste: When residents move out, they often leave a little (or a lot) behind in the form of abandoned furniture and other household items. This is consistently identified by property managers as the greatest resident-related garbage and recycling challenge. Sometimes the discarded objects even obstruct the regular collection of debris and prevent other residents from using the area. To address this issue, the Metro regional workgroup for multifamily recycling has developed English and Spanish language Resident Move-out Guides. Some creative property managers (and Master Recyclers) are also coordinating quarterly or seasonal clean-ups, yard sales, or community swap areas and bulletin boards to avoid illegal dumping and assist with timely and appropriate disposal.



• Landfills do not accept hazardous waste - Ask Metro •



• Landfills do not accept electronics - Oregon E-cycles •



• Coordinate holiday tree pickup with civic minded groups •



• Abandoned furniture and household items cause problems •

COMPOSTING FOOD SCRAPS IN PORTLAND

For rentals of one to four units in Portland, landlords are required to provide food scrap compost collection as part of the service. Composting food scraps is optional at multifamily communities. Most properties do not provide this service for their tenants. Many do not even have containers for yard debris because landscaping is managed by a separate company from the garbage and recycling company.

Portland multifamily residents are highly interested in food scrap composting and if you volunteer in this city you will likely be asked questions about why they don't have food scrap composting in their community or how to get it started. Property managers and landlords pay for the services and will need to decide if it is right for their property. Here are some tips for property managers.



Knowing When to Get Started

While composting isn't required, it is increasingly popular with residents. Before a property manager kicks off a composting program at their multifamily property, determine if they are set up for success or whether it's best to hold off.

Evaluate the current system. Composting works best when multifamily residents already manage garbage and recycling well. Evaluate collection at the property to see if the set up needs to be fine-tuned. If problems exist in this area, it is best to focus on improving recycling before taking on the challenges of composting.

Assess interest. Composting is most successful when at least half of the residents will commit to participate. Send an email survey or post a tear-off sheet near the mail-boxes to assess interest at the property.

Think the property is ready?

Here are the next steps for the landlord.

- **Get in touch with the garbage and recycling company.** Together, you can discuss everything you need to get started:
 - Number of containers needed
 - The best location for collecting food scraps
 - Food scrap collection days and frequency
 - Potential costs
- **Update the set up.** Add signage to the collection area that includes food scraps, recycling, glass and garbage. Make sure all collection containers are clearly stickered. Free signs and stickers are available through your local jurisdiction.
- **Contact residents.** Email or post updates to ensure residents know about the new composting program and any changes in service frequency. Order the composting guide and magnets to give to residents and help them compost the right way. Ensure that new residents receive materials as they move in.
- **Define success.** Create a few measures to evaluate the success of food scrap composting at your multifamily property, such as:
 - High resident participation
 - Less garbage collected
 - Increased sense of *doing the right thing*
- **Odor and vermin control.** With a little care, food scrap collection should not increase odor or vermin problems. Don't forget that food scraps are already in the garbage containers. Food scraps should be picked up with the same frequency or even more frequently as garbage. Property managers are responsible for keeping these containers clean. Store the containers outside and out of the sun, whenever possible. Line newspaper along the bottom of the container to help reduce smell. Ask maintenance staff to wash out the container after collection. Check with your garbage and recycling company to see if they clean, line or switch out containers.

MASTER RECYCLER PROJECTS IN MULTIFAMILY COMMUNITIES

The potential for creating better recycling at multifamily communities is huge

Property managers don't always have the time, motivation or know-how to recycle better. A little technical assistance can go a long way. Volunteering in multifamily communities is rewarding because you can help conserve high volumes of natural resources. With relatively simple projects, you can directly help 20, 30 or even 300 households recycle better!

Here are just a few ways you can help:

Door to Doors

Look in the Master Recycler newsletter or calendar for door to door outreach efforts. Door to Doors are a great way to answer individual residents' questions and clarify what goes in each container. They can also help clarify why recycling problems may be happening at a property. This sort of outreach is frequently requested by property managers who have high levels of contaminated recycling and want help in educating their residents. They are best to conduct after any problems with containers and signage are resolved so that the instructions you give can be consistent and simple. Some jurisdictions even include a free bag as a hand out for residents.



Adopt-a-community

Another way to help is to commit to supporting a multifamily community's recycling efforts over a period of time. If you've identified a multifamily community to adopt for the summer or longer term, your first action should be to contact the multifamily specialist who serves the area for this property. These specialists are listed later in this section. Every local government provides free educational materials including durable signs for collection sites, container stickers, posters, and resident brochures or door hangers. They also have bags for recycling collection.

These specialists can provide a site visit and technical assistance. They can often also provide information about how to reach the property manager and any history of working with this manager on the property.

The next steps will vary depending on the community. They may include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

- Assessing the garbage and recycling situation and recommending changes to service.
- Stickers and posting signs at garbage/recycling enclosures, community rooms, laundry rooms or mail centers.
- Working with the hauler or property manager to shift container sizes, enclosures or locations.
- Monitoring recycling containers to identify contamination or measure increase in recycling or decrease in waste as a result of your actions.
- Distributing educational materials.
- Conducting a one-on-one door to door. (You can contact the Master Recycler Program Manager if you would like to invite more Master Recyclers to help you with this effort).
- Presenting at a resident meeting or facilitating a recycling and waste prevention discussion.
- Setting up a display or tabling at a resident event.
- Coordinating a community yard/garage sale.
- Coordinating a community recycling collection event.
- Designing a community swap bulletin board.
- Helping set up a community swap area.

Clean-up, swap or reuse collection events

These can be a great way to manage bulky items. A few tips about putting on a clean-up event at a multifamily community:

- Contact the local jurisdiction specialist to tell them about your project. They can provide assistance with planning, funding ideas and/or outreach materials.
- Read the Metro Community Cleanup Guide, available online.
- Create a team that includes a member of management, a facilities staff person, and at least one active member of the community.

Washington County Master Recyclers have organized many of these types of events and share these tips based on their experience: Learn as much about the residents as possible. What are the primary languages spoken in the home? You will want to translate the information into the top two or three languages. Are there many families with children? If so, plan to include a kids activity to maximize participation. How do they prefer to receive information? Do not rely on Facebook if only 10 percent of the community has liked the community's page.

Schedule your event to avoid other major events and to best serve your audience. A Saturday morning may not be the best if the residents are usually busy with other activities on Saturdays.

Be clear in advertising about what you want and don't want. Have a plan for any unclaimed, leftover materials and use the event to advertise year-round recycling and reuse options to attendees.

Start by contacting the multifamily recycling coordinator in your area

City of Beaverton:

Phone: 503-526-2665

Website: www.beavertonoregon.gov/recycling

Email: recyclingmail@beavertonoregon.gov

City of Portland

Phone: 503-823-7202

Website: www.portland.gov/bps/garbage-recycling/multifamily-recycling

Email: multifamily@portlandoregon.gov

Clackamas County

Phone: 503-557-6363

Website: www.clackamas.us/recycling/multifamily.html

Email: wasteinfo@clackamas.or.us

Washington County

Phone: 503-846-3605

Website: www.WashingtonCountyRecycles.com

Email: recycle@co.washington.or.us

City of Gresham

Phone: 503-618-2525

Website: www.greshamoregon.gov/recycling/

Email: recycle@greshamoregon.gov

RESOURCE

Find the Metro Community Cleanup Guide online

BEYOND RECYCLING

Increasingly, multifamily property managers and residents want to incorporate other environmentally positive approaches to community living. Many local governments have resources that Master Recyclers should be aware of and share with interested parties. Some of these topics and areas include:



Energy savings. Tax credits and cash incentives are available to property owners in a variety of ways for simple things such as replacing windows and doors; insulating pipes; caulking and weather-stripping windows; and insulating attics, floors and walls. In addition, communities may be eligible for assistance with installing energy-efficient appliances. For more information, call Energy Trust of Oregon at 866-368-7878. Another option is free energy audits offered by metro-area utilities, including Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural and Cascade Natural Gas. They help evaluate current energy use and provide assistance with energy-efficiency improvements.

RESOURCE

Look for information on multi-family water conservation online at Conserve H2O.

Water conservation. Time and money savers can include installing low-water fixtures and appliances. Check out the new outreach flyer specific to multifamily communities available at the Regional Water Providers Consortium's website. This site is dedicated to water conservation education and resources.



Alternative transportation. Residents can be encouraged to use available buses and light rail simply by providing them with information through Trimet. A popular way to encourage residents to bike is by providing safe, covered bike storage on-site; additional resources and ideas can be found at Metro's *Drive Less, Save More* site.

Natural gardening and composting . A landscape can look beautiful without toxic chemicals. Simple things like leaving grass clippings on the lawn reduces fertilizer needs by 50 percent and saves staff time usually spent bagging the clippings; using compost can save money on fertilizer, control weeds, nourish plants and reduce the need for water. On-site composting of yard and garden waste may be an option for some multifamily communities depending on size and approach; more information and assistance can be found through local governments and Metro. The City of Portland's commercial food composting program is available to commercial properties including multifamily communities when it is feasible for the site; region-wide residential food composting is under development.

RESOURCE

Call Metro at 503-234-3000 or visit Metro's Yard and Garden webpage for more on natural gardening.



CONCLUSION

For Master Recyclers who live in multifamily settings or for those of you who are looking to have a very big impact quite quickly, working to improve recycling and materials management in multifamily housing can be a terrific option. Multifamily settings are a wonderful opportunity to reach many people at once and change habits and behaviors for an entire community. It is also worth noting that multifamily housing is becoming more and more common as the region's population grows. Working in multifamily settings does pose some specific challenges. It is quite common for recycling and garbage collection areas to be poorly designed or sited, and recycling can be difficult in communities with high turnover. That said, there are many wonderful resources to help you with such projects.

Start by reaching out to the multifamily recycling coordinator in your area who can likely provide you with recycling history for this location and give you outreach materials, including signs and brochures. From there you can try some of the strategies presented in this chapter, including one-on-one outreach and cleanup events. Beyond recycling, multifamily settings afford opportunities to share resources about composting, gardening best practices, alternative transportation, green remodeling, and ways to save energy and water. Remember that any work that you do in multifamily settings has the potential to reach many, many people and to make a big difference!