

Developing a Multi-Family Recycling Program



A Practical Guide To Setting Up Recycling Programs In Multi-Family Buildings

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100% Recycled Paper

DEFINITION

Multi-Family Recycling:

An on-site collection system of recyclable materials for residents in larger residential dwellings. In St. Paul our definition applies to apartments, townhomes and condominiums of 25 living units or more. We currently serve smaller buildings through our curbside recycling program.

HISTORY

Our experience in operating a multi-family recycling program began in the fall of 1986 when we implemented a pilot project in seven public housing high rises. In 1987 we added two private buildings and one more public housing building and concentrated our efforts on those ten buildings.

Our primary goal was to learn how promotional techniques affected resident participation, and our secondary goal was to learn how management, caretakers and the physical design of a building affected recycling program success.

In a nut shell what we found was that the best promotion is word of mouth. Either a personal contact by a resident or someone from our office seemed to have the greatest affect on participation. Second to this was a monetary incentive.

The other seemingly obvious thing we "learned" was that convenient container location was the number one concern of those people who did recycle.

We have expanded our program steadily since 1986. Currently we're serving 13,322 households in 363 buildings. Most buildings collect 4 materials: newspaper, cans, glass, and corrugated cardboard.

MULTI-FAMILY RECYCLING VS. CURBSIDE RECYCLING

Curbside recycling programs do not adequately meet the needs of persons living in larger residential complexes:

- Smaller dwelling units have limited storage space
- Access to curb can be difficult
- Too many materials on the curb is unsightly
- Participation is higher with on-site drop-off containers
- Each building or group of buildings requires individualized education

A COOPERATIVE MODEL

Our goal has been to design a recycling program to meet each building's needs, with input from building owners and staff, and residents where possible. This assures a quality program that has internal strength to maintain itself.

Also, by consulting with residents we have been able to select sites for containers which most closely meet residents' needs. We have also been able to tailor promotional materials to individual characteristics of a building.

STEPS TO CREATING A MULTI-FAMILY RECYCLING PROGRAM

GENERAL PROGRAM SET-UP

1. Assess needs, set goals
2. Secure funding
3. Contract with a hauler(s)
4. Purchase/lease containers
5. Find buildings



INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM SET-UP

6. Make agreement with building management
7. Design collection system
8. Educate residents
9. Monitor/ongoing communication



1. Assess Needs, Set Goals

EVALUATE THE NEEDS OF YOUR COMMUNITY

- Census data (number and size of buildings)
- Random survey of recycling attitudes of residents
- Are there or will there be mandates for provision of service?

DEFINE FRAMEWORK

- Size of buildings to be served
- Number of buildings to be served
- Populations to target
 - (public, private)
 - (mixed, senior)
 - (inner city, suburbs)
- Types of materials to be collected
 - (newspaper only)
 - (newspaper and glass only)
 - (other variations)

2. Secure Funding

WHY? IT COSTS MONEY!

- Containers
- Intensive set-up time
- Promotional materials (initial & ongoing)
- Collection services



SOURCES

- County/City assessment to residents
- Grant money
- City appropriations
- Waste disposal facility surcharge
- etc.

3. Contract With A Hauler

THE HAULER MUST BE ABLE TO:

- Access various types of buildings and driveways
- Unload larger containers
- Provide statistical information
- Maintain good relationship with buildings and you



4. Purchase / Lease Containers

CONTAINERS MUST BE:

- Easy for residents to access
- Easy for hauler to unload
- Adaptable to many different spaces and configurations
- Attractive
- Garbage proof
- Cohesive system understandable to all residents.



We have found that our 90 gallon containers adapt themselves well to most of our buildings. We are also looking into other container types and sizes to better accomodate the needs of the hauler while also meeting the needs of residents and building managers.

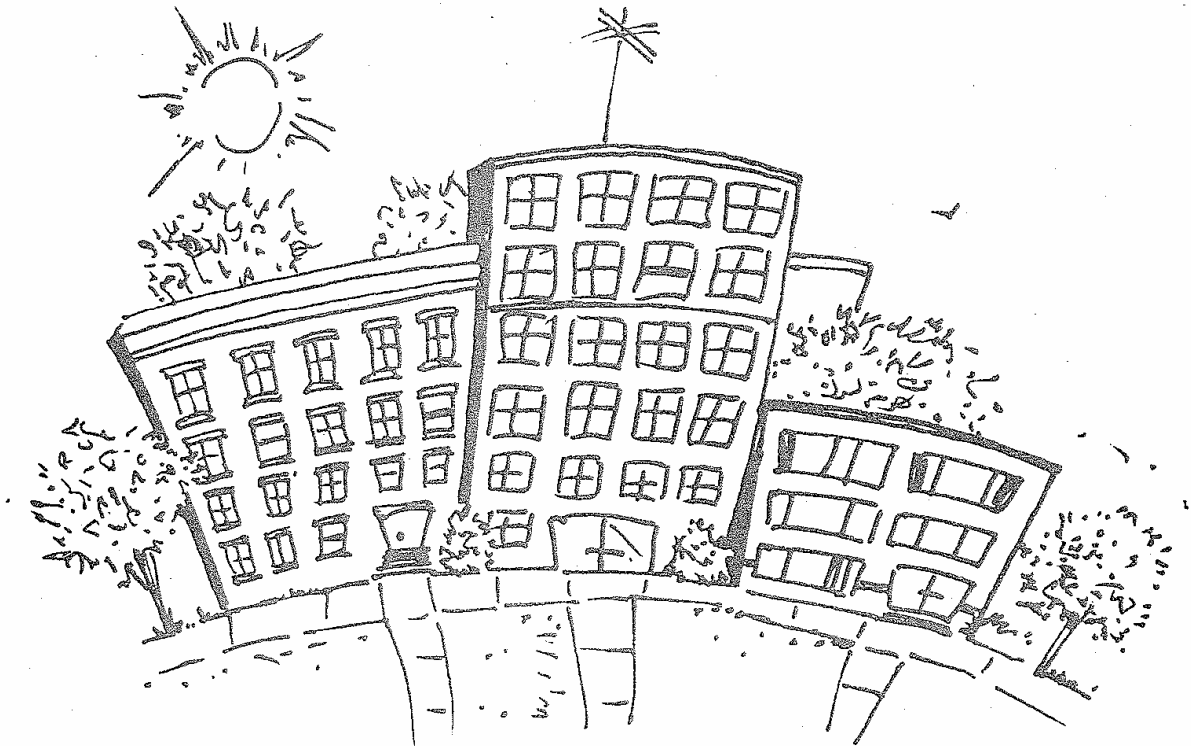
5. Find Buildings

PASSIVE

- Requests from management or residents

ACTIVE

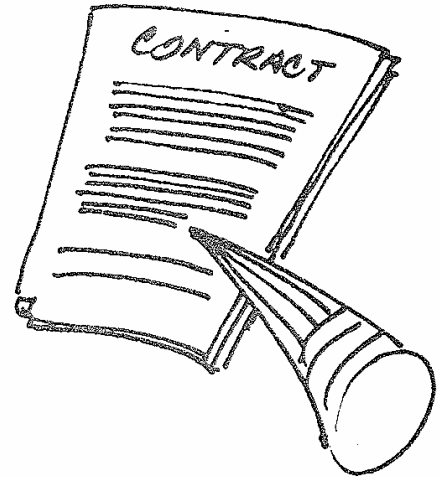
- Contact Multi Family Housing Association
- Submit press releases to local papers
- Feature article in newspaper
- Work with neighborhood/community organizations
- Cold contacts by phone or in person
- Contact your community's public housing agency



6. Make Agreement With Management

PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM

- Cost to them, if any
- What you will provide
 - containers
 - pickup
 - signs
 - promotional materials
 - feedback
 - recognition
- What they will provide
 - maintenance staff support
 - space for an adequate number of containers
 - distribution of brochures
 - communication with you
 - access key, etc., for hauler
- Benefits to them
 - may reduce garbage hauling costs
 - may reduce maintenance staff work as a result of less garbage
 - an ecologically sound service for residents



They may not be interested. That's o.k. There are plenty of others who will be interested.

PUT IN WRITING WHAT YOU'VE AGREED UPON.

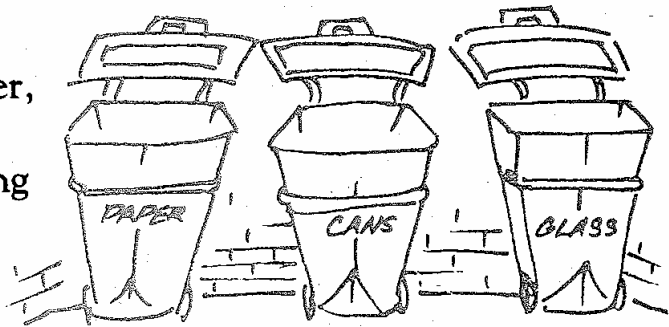
7. Design Collection System

- Work together with the building manager and the hauler to design a system best suited to the building's structure and resident needs.

POINTS TO CONSIDER:

CONTAINER LOCATION

- Safety, fire codes, aesthetics
- Ease of resident access
- Hauler accessibility
- Winter weather
- Scavengers
- Multiple sites for larger, spread out complexes
- Likelihood of attracting outside garbage



COLLECTION SPACE

Suitable space for collection and storage of recyclable materials must be provided in new or remodeled multi-family buildings with 12 or more units according to the Minnesota Waste Management Act of 1980.

MATERIALS COLLECTED

- Multiple category - cans, glass, paper, cardboard
- Paper only
- Other Variations

It is perhaps best to collect those materials outlined in your goals, but to offer variations on this in special situations (ie limited space, managers request).

NUMBER OF CONTAINERS

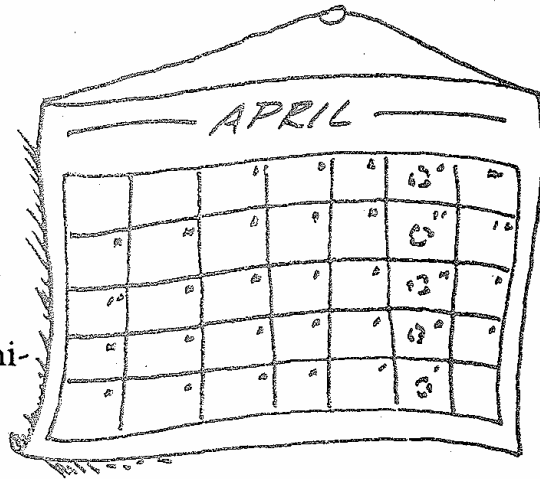
- ◆ Using 90 gallon containers such as we use, a 100 unit building will require:
 - 2-3 containers for paper
 - 1 container for clear glass
 - 1 container for green glass
 - 1 container for brown glass
 - 1 container for cans (mixed types)
 - cardboard flattened and stacked

Newspaper generally accounts for 70% of the materials collected.

- ◆ With mechanical pickup, larger, more efficient containers could be used, but be sure they are user friendly.

PICKUP SCHEDULE

- ◆ Weekly pickup has proven most appropriate for our settings. Bi-weekly and semi-weekly are also options depending on space and storage capacities.



- ◆ Where containers are inside a hallway or garage, determine who will move them out each week (hauler, caretaker).
- ◆ Be sure everyone agrees on the pickup day(s).

8. Educate Residents

INITIAL EDUCATION

- Brochures/flyers door-to-door
- Posters
- Presentation at resident meeting
- Letter from management
- Provide caretaker with extra flyers for new residents

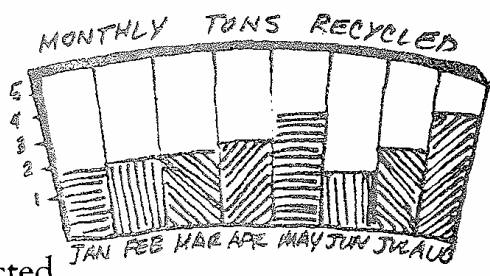


ON-GOING FEEDBACK AND INFORMATION

- Post permanent sign with instructions at each collection site
- Central bulletin board for recycling news
- Bar chart illustrating monthly tonnages
- Blurbs in resident newsletter
- Displays in community room
- Periodic personal visits
- Occasional reminder about how and why to recycle

INCENTIVES

- Contests
- Lottery
- Rebates for each ton collected
- Gimmicks-magnets, baskets, stickers
- Shared savings to residents



VOLUNTEERS — Nice to have but not always possible

- Keep collection site clean, keep materials sorted properly
- Help other residents carry materials to containers
- Offer suggestions for program set-up and improvement
- Create a community feeling and provide internal maintenance and support for the program

RECOGNITION

- Certificates of appreciation to management, residents, caretakers, volunteers, etc.
- Recognition plaque with yearly tonnages indicated
- Letter from mayor/public official

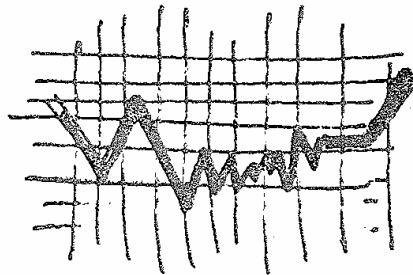
CONCERNS TO BE AWARE OF:

- Not everyone will participate
- Some will not follow guidelines
- Containers may be mistakenly used for garbage
- Give residents time to change their habits
- Frequent turnover of property managers and caretakers
- Won't work if building management doesn't support it

9. Monitor/On-Going Communication

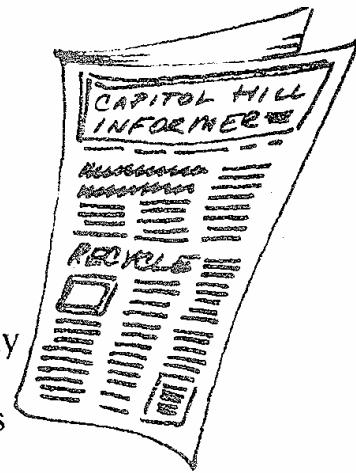
MONITOR

- Chart separate weights for all buildings (Hauler can easily estimate tonnage at a building if s/he knows weight equivalents for container capacity.)
- Record all educational/promotional interventions
- Request comments from hauler on condition of materials

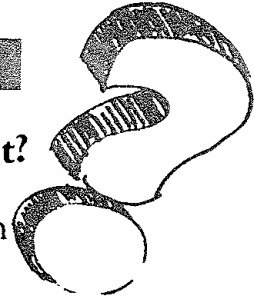


ON-GOING COMMUNICATION

- Provide monthly feedback to managers on tons collected
- Follow up on problems immediately
- Provide short blurbs/tips/cartoons for resident newsletter
- Solicit managers' suggestions
- Be sure new residents are getting information about the program



SOME QUESTIONS



What kind of participation rates can I expect?

We have experienced 30-80% participation, with 50% being typical.

How many pounds per household per month would you estimate from multi-family households?

Generally 15-20 lbs. \times # units/mo. is given as the norm. We have experienced up to 45 lbs. \times # units/mo. in some cases.

Should buildings be expected to pay for part or all of the costs associated with their program?

A fee may be necessary if funding does not cover operational costs. Remember, recycling is a service.

How long does it take to get a program up and running?

Each situation is different. However, three weeks to a month would be a minimum and it could be 3-4 months if committees and/or boards need to approve container placement, type of materials to be collected etc.

Other Resources

Metropolitan Council

230 East 5th Street
Saint Paul, MN 55101

Contact: Grants Administrator for Solid Waste 291-6536

Minnesota Public Research Interest Group

2512 Delaware Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Contact: B.A.R.T.E.R. Program Director 627-4035

Minnesota Office of Waste Management

1350 Energy Park Lane
Saint Paul, MN 55108

Contact: 649-5750

Super Cycle, Inc.

775 Rice Street
Saint Paul, MN 55117

Contact: Commercial Accounts Manager 224-5081