

Chapter 619: Waste and Recycling Code FAQ:

What's changing?

- Makes the mandate to recycle explicit.
- Waste to be placed in a substantial watertight container not exceeding 35 gallons with a close-fitting lid or leak-proof bag.
- To prevent contamination, waste is no longer allowed to be set out for collection in blue containers. Blue is reserved for recycling only.
- Recycling can only be placed in a city issued container or substantial watertight blue container clearly marked for recycling not exceeding 35 gallons. If a recycling container is used, place all material in loosely and not in a plastic bag.
- If a resident cannot utilize a blue container for their recycling, any color of a 35 gallon container is acceptable as long as they mark it is for recycling. Either thru writing "recycling" on the container or tying a blue bag onto the handle as the last resort.
- Codifies set out times: no sooner than 6 p.m. the day prior to collection, no later than 6 a.m. day of collection.
- Containers must be removed from collection site by 10 p.m. the day of collection. No removal time was previously specified.
- Anyone not serviced by the city must now label their dumpster or storage container with the name and address of establishment to distinguish ownership.
- Accepted recyclable materials are moving out of code and into Waste Regulations in order to allow for flexibility with changing markets.
- Establishes residential composting guidelines.
- Specifies that the city does not accept computers and TV's for curbside collection.
- Sets tenants up for success in waste and recycling compliance:
 - Requires landlords to provide both waste and recycling storage containers for their tenants.
 - Better communicates the existing requirement to provide a Pittsburgh-specific Waste and Recycling Fact Sheet to tenants as part of leases.
 - If not in compliance with Chapter 619, violation notice will be sent to both tenants and landlords.

Why so many new rules?

The decision was made to codify portions of existing Waste Regulations in order to better to communicate requirements, and be able to better enforce. Applying plain language standards cleaned ~6,000 words up into ~3,500 words.

Isn't recycling optional?

Everyone in Pittsburgh is required to recycle!

The mandate for large Pennsylvania municipalities to establish a local recycling program began with the state's [Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 101 of 1988](#). Pittsburgh rolled out its recycling program by establishing designated drop-off centers and then phasing into bi-weekly pick-up in 1990.

What materials can I recycle?

The city currently accepts these materials for recycling:

- Plastic & glass bottles, jugs, jars, and tubs 3 gallons or less
- Aluminum/steel cans
- Cardboard
- Mixed paper: office paper, newspaper, magazines, books, catalogs, junk mail, phone books, and paperboard
 - Please remove all plastic and metal lids and caps and throw them away.
 - Anyone not serviced by the city is required to recycle what is described in the waste regulations and through their private collector at this time. The city is gathering resources for glass recycling alternatives and is in the process of updating its waste regulations. This would include commercial, institutional, and multi-unit dwellings.

Who does the city provide service to?

- The city provides service to single family dwellings, small apartment buildings (with five or fewer units), and municipal establishments (those owned/operated by the city).
- Commercial establishments, institutional establishments, multi-family dwellings, and publicly-managed establishments are responsible for hiring private collectors.
 - The city may collect from these establishments at the discretion of the Public Works director, and with a formalized agreement.
- Major change: the city no longer collects waste and recycling from institutional or commercial establishments, but may collect recyclables at the Director's discretion.
 - Institutional establishment examples: religious institutions, non-public schools, and universities.
 - Publicly-managed establishments: city authorities (PWSA), State and Federally-owned buildings.

Why doesn't the city provide recycling bins?

The City of Pittsburgh has recently wrapped up a program to distribute 100,000+ blue recycling bins to residents and became bag free in 2024. The city distributed 32-gallon blue bins with a lid to all city residents who are serviced by Environmental Services. If you think your home has been missed or if your bin is stolen/cracked, please call 311 to put in a ticket.

Please keep in mind this effort was a one-time initiative that was grant funded with enough resources only to distribute one blue bin per household that Environmental Services collects recyclables from. If more than one bin is needed or the original bin was not kept with the address, residents are required to supply their own blue bin, clearly marked for recycling and not in excess of 35 gallons.

Why can't I use blue recycling bags for garbage anymore?

Contamination is the single biggest reason recyclable materials are sent to the landfill and not recycled. By clarifying that blue recycling containers are for recyclables only minimizes contamination and maximizes the amount of material recycled. Plastic bags are problematic throughout their life-cycle - they are made from non-renewable resources, often used just once, are hard to recycle, and do not biodegrade. They litter sidewalks and parks, clog storm drains and recycling machinery, and contaminate soil and water with microplastics. Additionally, plastic bags are considered contamination when recyclables are sorted at the facility which increases costs that City could be using for other projects that residents are concerned about.

How will these changes be communicated?

A number of different ways! With the help of Environmental Services and Innovation & Performance (I&P) Department, each entity will reach the general public through mailers, news media, university publications and radio, the city's website, social media sites including Next Door, community meetings, and the help of city Council offices. The city will also have specific messaging/ frequently for businesses and landlords.

How will these changes be specifically communicated to businesses and landlords?

With the help of Environmental Services and I&P, the city will mail postcards to more than 15,000 businesses reminding them of the requirement and responsibility to recycle and hire a private collector. It is the private collector's responsibility to not operate in residential areas between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

The city will be sending letters to landlord associations to ensure direct notification of these changes. This communication will specify the new requirement to provide containers for both waste and recycling storage, as well as share the updated Waste and Recycling Fact Sheet for them to include in tenants' leases.

The new requirement of marking dumpsters and containers (of anyone not receiving city service) with addresses will also be included.

What was the process for these changes?

Chapter 619 had not been amended or updated since 2011! Councilperson Strassburger’s office worked directly with the Department of Public Works’ Bureau of Environmental Services and in conjunction with:

- Operations staff in the Mayor’s office
- City Planning’s Division of Sustainability & Resilience
- State Department of Environmental Protection
- City Law Department
- Pennsylvania Resources Council
- 311 Response Center

What will enforcement look like?

When Public Works’ foremen see violations or respond to 311 requests and a violation exists, they will issue warning notices. If a property is a rental, notices will go to both the owner(s) and the lessee(s).

The owner(s) will be the ones ultimately held responsible if the violation remains.

The fines listed below have not been changed, just moved into a table format.

	Initial violation	Additional violation
Person, Single Family Dwelling, Small Apartment Building	Fifty dollars (\$50.00)	Maximum five hundred dollars (\$500.00)
Multi-Family Dwelling	One hundred dollars (\$100.00)	Maximum five hundred dollars (\$500.00)
Commercial, Institutional, or Publicly-Managed Establishment	One thousand dollars (\$1,000.00)	Maximum five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00)

What about litter and illegal dumping? Isn't that trash, too?

Littering and illegal dumping are outlawed by a separate section of [City Code, 601.11](#).

Why does the city only provide service to buildings with 5 (five) units or fewer?

The city does not have the capacity or equipment to provide this service to multi-family dwellings with 6 (six) or more units.

Owners/ managers of multi-family dwellings with more than 6 (six) units have always been responsible for hiring their own private collectors so their waste and recycling may be stored in containers larger than thirty-five (35) gallons.

Overtime multi-family dwellings will continue to include the clarification that complexes of buildings (such as condos) will be considered as whole and not by the individual units.