

# Recycling Online



## Going organic in multi-family housing – part 2

by Roger Guttentag

Last month, this column focused on the reasons why multi-family organics collection programs were being implemented and reviewed some of recent reports about efforts in regions within the U.S. During the last decade, similar program developments have been undertaken outside the U.S., particularly in Canada and Europe, and this column will summarize some of the online information that is available in regards to those foreign programs.

### On the ground in Canada

A handful of Canadian municipalities have in recent years issued detailed reports on pilot programs for organics collection. The key findings can help inform programs elsewhere.

**City of Burnaby** – Located in British Columbia, Burnaby serviced at the date of its report 30,000 multi-family units. Many were already participating in a green waste recovery program and officials were interested in expanding organics collections to include food scraps. A six-month food-scrap collection pilot was launched in December 2010 in a half-dozen buildings covering a range of housing demographics. Key findings, including food-scrap recovery data, showed high interest in the project by residents along with increases in participation rates during the project timeline, lower-than-expected contamination rates and no complaints regarding pests or odors. The City decided that the pilot program's results provided a positive basis for a decision to expand the program to cover all multi-family residences.

**City of Richmond** – Also located in

British Columbia, Richmond serviced at the date of its report approximately 31,500 multi-family units. The City Council authorized a 15-month pilot program that ran from October 2013 to test four different food-scrap collection configurations involving carts that were unlined or lined with a compostable bag and different methods through which residents collected their food scraps (examples included wrapping material in paper or using smaller paper or compostable bags).

The collection group using lined carts and allowing residents to capture their food scraps in paper bags had the highest diversion rates. The average per-unit diversion rate was estimated to be 4 kilograms (almost 9 pounds), but city staff believed that a

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diversion rate of 8 kilograms per unit could be achieved through expanded services and public education.

**City of Toronto** – Appendix E of a May 2007 staff report, “Proposed Initiatives and Financing Model to Get to 70% Solid Waste Diversion by 2010,” provided a summary of multi-family organics collection pilot program findings involving 28 buildings covering the period of 2002 through 2006.

A variety of collection methods were used, including carts, bulk containers, deep collection (partially underground containers) and chute-collection systems. The average weekly collection rate was estimated to

be 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) per unit. Contamination rates were found to be generally low, but the report also acknowledged that because the tenants in pilot buildings were voluntary participants, they were also more motivated to make the project successful. The report recommended expanding the multi-family organics collection city-wide on a gradual basis and suggested providing kitchen collectors for all units.

The report concluded no single collection approach should be relied on, and it stated building management support was more important to achieving high recovery rates than the particular collection method that was chosen.

### Reviews and best practices

**Ireland Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)** – The IEPA published a report that presents the results of a 10-month project researching how recovering organic wastes from multi-family residences could be accomplished. This was done as part of a larger national program to reduce the landfilling of organic wastes that reflected European Union goals for eliminating greenhouse gas emissions from waste sources. Information was obtained from literature searches, site visits and surveys of tenants and other relevant stakeholders such as property managers.

The report covers Irish waste composition data, national waste policies affecting this issue and the specifics of Irish apartments. There is also an extensive case study review of multi-family organics collection programs operating in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Recommendations that emerged from this study include the value of site-specific evaluations, extensive public awareness activities, the use of collectors for each unit and centralized storage containers that are serviced on a weekly basis.

**Waste in Action** – Another report, “A Global Review of Dry Recycling and

Food Waste Collections and Communications Initiatives for Flats and Multi-Occupancy Dwellings,” was published in 2010 by Waste in Action, which is a joint project from municipalities in France and the U.K. The intent of the report was to identify common problems and solutions for both dry recycling and food-scrap recovery programs in multi-family properties.

The food-scrap section of the report includes over 40 multi-family organics collection case studies of systems operating in the U.S., Europe, Japan and Australia. At the end of the case studies, a series of conclusions are listed to identify elements that are common to all of them with respect to physical factors such as container location as well as psychological factors such as the need for extensive public education efforts tailored to the tenant population.

**Recycling Council of British Columbia (RCBC)** – The RCBC published “Best Practices for Multi-Family Food Scraps Collection” in February 2011 to provide technical guidance to municipalities within the province as well as in other regions of Canada. The report’s information is based on a literature search as well as interviews with individuals who had direct experience with these types of programs.

The report’s nine chapters cover all aspects of multi-family organics collection, touching on materials collected, collection methods, collection containers and program education. The last two chapters provide additional information references and summaries of five Canadian and U.S. multi-family organics collection programs. The most useful chapters cover the value of container liners for encouraging tenant

## Web Address Directory

Waste in Action – Global Review of Dry Recycling and Food Waste Collections	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/World-Multi1">tinyurl.com/World-Multi1</a>
City of Burnaby (B.C.) – Multi-Family Food Scraps Recycling	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Burnaby-Multi">tinyurl.com/Burnaby-Multi</a>
City of Richmond (B.C.) – Multi-Family Organics Recycling	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Richmond-Multi">tinyurl.com/Richmond-Multi</a>
City of Toronto Solid Waste Diversion Goals	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Toronto-Multi">tinyurl.com/Toronto-Multi</a>
Ireland Environmental Protection Agency – Organic Waste Management in Apartments	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Ireland-Multi">tinyurl.com/Ireland-Multi</a>
MetroVancouver (B.C.) – Food Scrap Recycling: Tools and Resources for Building Managers	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Vancouver-Multi">tinyurl.com/Vancouver-Multi</a>
Multi Residential Green Bin Program for City of Toronto Residents	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Toronto-Multi2">tinyurl.com/Toronto-Multi2</a>
Recycling Council of British Columbia – Organics Working Group Report	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/BC-Multi">tinyurl.com/BC-Multi</a>

participation and the important intersection of program education and outreach with gaining the support of building managers and staff.

**Metro Vancouver** – The Vancouver, British Columbia metropolitan region adopted regulations that required the separation of food waste from municipal solid waste starting Jan. 1, 2015. As part of the program for implementing this regulation, MetroVancouver developed a very comprehensive set of tools to help multi-family property managers understand and work effectively with the regulation’s requirements. This included how-to information regarding methods for collecting food scraps and developing educational materials in the form of posters, signage and tenant information brochures.

## Final thoughts

This survey of documentation for multi-family organics collection programs shows a remarkable degree of consistency

around the world with regard to the type of technical, managerial and educational issues that need to be addressed and the general strategies that are utilized to resolve them. What this research has also shown is that the implementation of these strategies, even within the same communities, must be tailored to the specific needs of the multi-family population to be serviced. There is no “one size fits all” template. Finally, the evaluation of a multi-family organics collection program’s effectiveness must take into consideration the cultural attributes of the tenant population of each property.

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