



## Moving forward on multi-family – part 1

by Roger Guttentag

Many regions of the U.S. and Canada are striving to achieve ambitious improvements in waste disposal reduction, especially in response to the adoption of zero waste policies as discussed in my May and June 2014 columns (“When nothing is something, parts 1 and 2”). One key strategy for achieving these goals is to identify segments of a community that have underperforming waste recovery programs or don’t have access to the services these programs require for success. A prime example: multi-family dwellings, especially those with five or more housing units.

The most recent census data shows that these types of dwellings make up about 18 percent of total U.S. housing stock and contain a total of 24 million units. According to the National Multifamily Housing Council (NMHC), 75 to 80 percent of those units are rentals in buildings with five or more units. However, multi-family dwellings are often concentrated in more urbanized regions and data from the NMHC shows that in large metropolitan areas, multi-family units typically make up between 16 and 40 percent of all occupied housing, with New York City topping 50 percent.

It is for this reason that a significant effort has been invested in the last 10 years by state, provincial and municipal governments for determining what the best practices for multi-family dwelling (MFD) recycling should be. The data sources for these best practice analyses include evaluations of current practices on multi-family recycling collection, findings

from multi-family recycling pilot programs or case study surveys based on well-regarded programs operating in the U.S., Canada and Europe.

## The foundation for best practices in MFD recycling

A review of best practice analyses published within the last five years shows findings are usually presented as recommendations for addressing specific challenges confronting efforts to improve multi-family recycling performance or as a listing of guidelines to be followed based on a careful review of attributes from high-performing or innovative multi-family recycling programs. In some cases, the best practice analysis may be the result of combining both approaches.

The following best practice analyses are examples of reports that include discussions of the challenges or obstacles that confront multi-family recycling.

### *StopWaste.org – Multi-Family Dwelling Recycling Evaluation Report*

This report, published in December 2008, is organized into six sections. The first one provides a summary status of multi-family dwelling recycling programs within Alameda County (California), a discussion of significant challenges facing multi-family recycling and examples of innovative practices within as well as outside of Alameda County.

### *Iowa City – Apartment & Condominium Recycling Program – Best Management Practices Manual*

Iowa City determined that only a small percentage of the apartment complexes not receiving municipal curbside recycling had access to alternative private recycling services. However, it was noted that there was a rising demand for recycling services among these residents and, according to Iowa City, 60 percent were willing to pay for recycling collection. In order to promote the development of successful MFD recycling, Iowa City obtained funding for a pilot recycling program at five apartment complexes in 2012. The results of this project were reported in the manual, and specific obstacles or challenges were identified and recommended actions for handling them based on the pilot program results were presented.

### *Peoria County (Illinois) – Multi-Family Best Practices Inventory*

This inventory starts by providing an extensive listing of potential barriers to MFD recycling that is organized with respect to specific stakeholders such as property owners, haulers and residents. The recommended responses to these barriers are then presented within a framework of six categories such as management, participation and fees. The document also provides brief case studies of three multi-family dwelling recycling programs located in the U.S.

### *St. Paul (Minnesota) – Recycle It Forward*

The “Recycle It Forward” report, published in August 2013, is an assessment of St. Paul’s recycling system based on data

collected in 2012 through mail surveys, focus group discussions and interviews with select stakeholders. This assessment included data from multi-family dwelling constituencies, especially Somali residents, regarding their participation in recycling programs, problems they have encountered that affected their willingness to participate and changes that were recommended for improving the delivery of program services.

### ***Common Findings Regarding MFD Recycling Challenges***

While these best practice analyses do mention challenges that may be specific to the communities they cover, a review of all the reports finds the following issues are being encountered by most communities:

- Difficulties in measuring multi-family dwellings' recycling performance or resident participation
- Residents not comprehending economic benefits of recycling
- Inadequate or confusing education and outreach as well as language barrier problems

## **Web Address Directory**

Iowa City – Apartment/Condo Pilot Recycling Program	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/IowaCity-MultiFam">tinyurl.com/IowaCity-MultiFam</a>
National Multifamily Housing Council	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/National-MultiFam">tinyurl.com/National-MultiFam</a>
Peoria County (Illinois) – Multi-Family Best Practices Inventory	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Peoria-MultiFam">tinyurl.com/Peoria-MultiFam</a>
St. Paul (Minnesota) – Recycle It Forward	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/StPaul-MultiFam">tinyurl.com/StPaul-MultiFam</a>
StopWaste.org – Multi-Family Dwelling Recycling Evaluation Report	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Ala-MultiFam">tinyurl.com/Ala-MultiFam</a>
U.S. Census – American Fact Finder	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Census-MultiFam">tinyurl.com/Census-MultiFam</a>

- Lack of convenient container access or inadequate container capacity
- Resident concerns over extra costs
- Turnover in resident populations or building management

well as innovative practices and approaches that are being used for expanding MFD recycling to include organic wastes.

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Guttentag's website, [recyclingandreuse.com](http://recyclingandreuse.com), houses all of his Recycling Online columns and other resources for recycling professionals of all stripes.

## **What's to come**

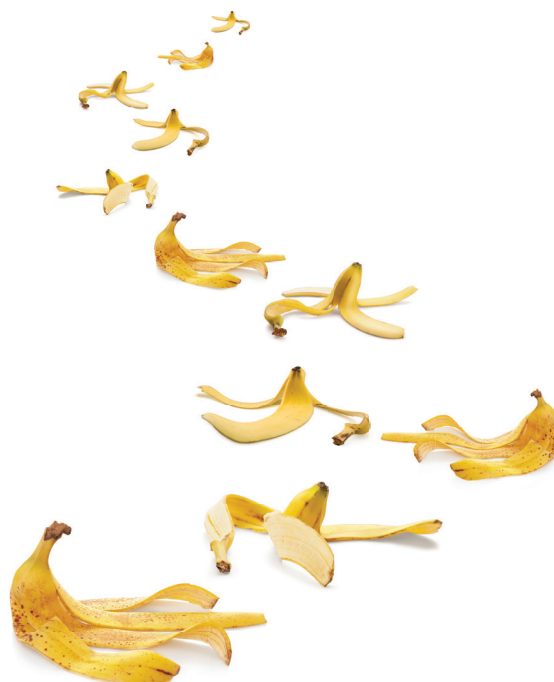
The survey of best practice analyses of MFD programs will continue next month with a look at communities that have undertaken full program case studies. In addition, I will detail some useful implementation guides as

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