



Commercial Recycling: Snapshot of Local Agency Programs and Policies 2009

About the Snapshot

In Spring 2009, the Institute for Local Government's California Climate Action Network surveyed cities and counties to gather information about activities, policies and programs in five areas related to climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions: commercial recycling, [civic engagement](#), [green building](#), [land use and community design](#), and [efficient transportation](#). Case stories were prepared for ten communities to provide more detailed background information. While the information gathered does not reflect the all of the commercial recycling programs in California's communities, it does provide a snap shot of trends, opportunities, constraints and lessons learned.

This project was conducted in partnership with the California Integrated Waste Management Board.

Snapshot Summary

- Programs to encourage or mandate commercial recycling are increasing in California cities and counties.
- Consistent with the adage that one size does not fit all, the types of programs to encourage or require commercial recycling vary considerably among communities and are structured to reflect individual community characteristics.
- Tiered rate structures that make recycling more cost effective are prominent motivating factors for businesses to recycle, regardless of whether commercial recycling is mandatory or not.
- Education and technical assistance essential to promoting compliance by businesses.
- Enforcement of mandatory commercial recycling programs vary among communities, with emphasis generally placed on education and technical assistance rather than penalties.

Commercial Recycling and Climate Change

Sixty percent of landfill waste is generated by businesses. Promoting commercial recycling helps keep recyclable materials out of landfills. This conserves resources, extends the life of the landfill, saves businesses money and reduces the potential generation of methane, a greenhouse gas that is released from improperly

Highlights of Local Agency Commercial Recycling Activities

- While some agencies require all businesses to recycle, some agencies provide limited exemptions based upon size facility or quantity of waste/recyclables generated. Similarly, some agencies include restaurants and multi-family complexes in the requirements and some do not.

- Tiered rate structures serve as an incentive to businesses to recycle, regardless of whether the agency has a mandatory commercial recycling program.
- In some communities, co-mingled trash and recyclables are sent to a material recovery facility (often referred to as a dirty MRF), thus resulting in de-facto mandatory commercial recycling for all generators. In communities with dirty MRFs, offering businesses free bins to separate cardboard and white paper from the other co-mingled waste can reduce contamination of recyclable materials separated at the MRF.
- For those communities with older business areas, such as historic districts or redevelopment areas, providing communal collection/storage bins where businesses can place recyclables makes recycling feasible for businesses that otherwise could not recycle due to space limitations.
- In some communities, the hauler is responsible for ensuring compliance, while in other communities, the local agency is responsible for ensuring compliance.
- Both agencies and haulers provide outreach and education of community businesses, including waste audits and personal contact, to promote increased commercial recycling.
- Determining compliance rates is difficult, especially in large communities with many businesses.
- Because enforcement of mandatory recycling requirements is costly, many agencies emphasize education and technical assistance for the largest generators and those businesses that request assistance, rather than fines or other penalties.

Opportunities, Constraints and Lessons Learned

- Whether an agency has a mandatory commercial recycling is not related to the type solid waste regulatory structure (i.e., exclusive or non-exclusive franchise or open competition/permit or license).
- Just having a mandatory commercial recycling ordinance alone won't guarantee commercial recycling. It must be complemented by a robust education and technical assistance program for the businesses.
- Enforcement is difficult and expensive – and, agencies are reluctant to become the recycling police.
- It is important to ensure the agency's mandatory recycling ordinance is harmonized with any existing (or new) franchise agreement or contracts.
- Working with small businesses and ethnic business owners can help promote success.

- A tiered rate structure with lower costs for recycling services significantly increases recycling by businesses.
- When undertaking a recycling program geared toward a large number of businesses, start educating the largest businesses first to capture the maximum amount of recyclables earlier in the program. .
- It's tough to increase the rate of commercial recycling when businesses in downtown buildings don't have convenient access to recycling facilities; innovative solutions can help increase recycling.
- Providing free bins to encourage source separation of cardboard and paper can increase recycling rates at MRF and reduce costs to generators.
- Be sure all businesses, and especially new ones, are aware that recycling services are available from haulers.



Commercial Recycling

So, What are Counties and Cities Doing?

Counties and cities that have a mandatory commercial recycling program or ordinance.

<p>COUNTIES (Click on links to read about that county's activities.)</p>
<p>Sacramento San Diego</p>

<p>CITIES (Click on links to read about that city's activities.)</p>
<p>Antioch Arcadia Beverly Hills Chula Vista Huntington Beach Irvine Kingsburg La Mirada Loomis Ojai Poway San Leandro Santa Clarita Santa Rosa</p>





Counties and cities that have mandatory commercial recycling programs that apply to multi-family buildings and/or restaurant food waste.

	Multi-Family Buildings	Restaurant Food Waste
Counties (Click on links to read about that county's activities.)	San Diego	Alameda San Diego
Cities (Click on links to read about that city's activities.)	Antioch Beverly Hills Chula Vista Huntington Beach Kingsburg La Mirada Ojai Poway South Pasadena	Beverly Hills Chula Vista Loomis



Counties and cities that offer either or both of the following activities to encourage commercial recycling.

COUNTIES
(Click on links to read about that county's activities.)

Alameda
[Sacramento](#)
[San Diego](#)

CITIES
(Click on links to read about that city's activities.)

Antioch
[Arcadia](#)
Belmont
[Chula Vista](#)
Beverly Hills
Fremont
[Irvine](#)
[Kingsburg](#)
[Ojai](#)
[Poway](#)
San Leandro
Santa Clarita
Santa Rosa

Activities in this area may include one or both of the following:

- **Active educational outreach with haulers and/or businesses**
- **Business audits to encourage recycling**

Tell us about your agency's programs

Is your city or county's civic engagement program missing from our lists? Let us know what your community is doing to engage the community in climate change activities by completing our Climate Leadership Story Form – [Commercial Recycling](#).