

# METRO VANCOUVER'S COMPOSTING PROGRAM TOOK EFFECT JANUARY 1, 2015

Recycling Final Frontier: Condo and apartment buildings must compost food waste or be hit with penalties come the summer

// BY MICHELLE HOPKINS



**A MOVE BY METRO VANCOUVER TO BEGIN COLLECTING** food scraps and other organic waste from condos and apartment buildings is the latest example of the expanding efforts by municipalities across the province to recycle large quantities of unused food in order to cut back the amount going to the landfill. January first rang in more than a New Year — it was also the day in which Metro Vancouver's Food Scraps Recycling program was expanded to include the mandatory ordinance for apartments and condos.

Metro Vancouver is home to approximately 152,000 condos/apartments in multi-family buildings serviced by private waste collectors. As of last summer, only five per cent of those buildings voluntarily adopted the green bin collection, according to a staff report. Albert Shames, the city's director of waste management, says some larger buildings fear the increase costs with this new program will be too exorbitant. "There will be an extra cost for buildings as it's an extra collection, however tipping fees for processing of organic material at the two local processors, Harvest Power and Envirosmart, tend to be lower than the cost to dispose of material at the landfill," adds Shames. "There may be some offsetting of costs as a result of lower tipping fees for composting. The best thing to do is speak to their existing waste hauler to get up-to-date costing." When the program was initially rolled out to single family homes back in April 2013, there was concern about vermin, but moving the scraps from the garbage can to the composting bin doesn't change much. If it's done properly, Shames says, there are no issues at all. Meanwhile, the environmental benefits of recycling the organic waste are significant. Since the city's waste collection service adopted the green bin system for single-family homes, it has reduced garbage going to disposal by 40 per cent and increased material going to beneficial use through composting by a whopping 60 per cent.



Concert Properties is one developer who is blazing the way in the industry, with its company-wide initiative to create an easy way for its rental and owner-occupied buildings to recycle and compost. Since 2005, Concert has been implementing the program in all of its rental properties. According to Jonathan Meads, sustainability manager at Concert Properties, it invested between \$3,000 and \$9,000 instigating a simple colour-coded visual recycling system in each building, along with easily-identifiable graphic icons that clearly categorize each of the streams.

The easy to follow system allows residents to divert Styrofoam, small appliances, electronic waste, light bulbs, batteries, soft plastics, mixed paper/cardboard and mixed containers from the landfill into one of its 10 recycling streams. The results have been impressive - Concert's garbage related greenhouse gas emissions fell 80 per cent compared to their baseline in 2010.

"This significant drop in garbage proves that our concept really works," says Meads. Now, in an effort to further its impact and reduction in waste and emissions, Concert has begun rolling out its composting and recycling in all of its buildings – rental and owner-occupied – with a goal of achieving a 90 per cent diversion over its requirements. "Our most recent building downtown, Salt in Yaletown, is now on board and we are implementing the program to our newest building, Era in Victoria this spring," he says, adding Concert Properties has absorbed all of the costs for its program. In addition to its colour-coded recycling rooms, each resident is provided with a composting bucket and a new recycling guide (produced in seven languages). "The program needs to be as easy and convenient as possible so that our residents don't object to it," says Bev Greene, vice president property management at Concert Properties. "To that end we've made sure each room is well ventilated, spotless and the bins are extremely clean."

Niko is one condo dweller who fully supports the plan - lauding Concert Properties for going above and beyond in its commitment to the composting and recycling program. "I've lived in other apartment buildings and their composting programs were pretty much non-existent," says Niko, a recent university graduate. "Here it's quite unique — the owners make it really easy to stay on board the program." Niko explains that each new condo owner/renter at Yaletown's Salt building receives a package explaining in detail what its composting and recycling program entails. "They have made it so easy that the only excuse not to use the facility is laziness," he says, adding the welcome package also contains six months worth of environmentally-friendly household cleaners. Meads went on to say: "You can give residents a bucket and tell them to compost, but that doesn't mean that they will just comply. We have learned that education, habit and simplification are ultimately what will spur results, and the time we have put into understanding this, and simplifying the recycling and composting process for all of our residents is what has allowed us to see incredible results."

Ultimately, the goal is to be left with very little in the traditional garbage can, adds Shames. Beginning this summer, Metro Vancouver will start slapping penalties on those developers and property managers who place any organics in the garbage bins.

**The City of Vancouver has many resources available on its website at [vancouver.ca/home-property-development/food-isnt-garbage-2015-organics-ban.aspx](http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/food-isnt-garbage-2015-organics-ban.aspx) to help building managers and strata councils navigate how to get a system set up, including what companies can provide service, what questions to ask and what issues to deal with.**