

Recycling: High-Density Residential & Commercial Properties Preliminary Resource Paper

Chicago Recycling Coalition

www.chicagorecycling.org



Issue: Implement policies to significantly increase recycling rates for multi-unit buildings and commercial businesses.

History and Background

The Chicago High Density Residential and Commercial Source Reduction and Recycling Ordinance (Ordinance) was enacted in 1993. The Ordinance requires owners, governing associations or condominium boards of buildings with 5 or more units, as well as operators of commercial establishments and office buildings to establish an effective recycling program for their properties by which at least three types of materials are capable of being recycled.

Current Plans/State of Affairs

Though the Ordinance has been in effect for nearly 20 years, many properties subject to it are not in compliance and it is widely known that the city rarely enforces the Ordinance. Further, the fines for failure to comply range from only \$25 to \$100 per violation, and so many owners of these buildings and businesses would rather risk occasionally paying the low fine, rather than pay for more costly recycling services.

Currently, 19% of the waste collected by private haulers (rather than by Chicago's Department of Streets and Sanitation (DSS)) is recycled. Though this is more than double the amount currently collected by the DSS, it could be greatly increased by enforcing the Ordinance now, and revising it in the near future to make enforcement actions more effective, as well as to increase the types of materials required to be recycled. Properties subject to the Ordinance account for more than double the waste generated at all Chicago properties and so until these properties are required to recycle, Chicago's recycling program will continue to be incomplete and ineffective.

Chicago Recycling Coalition (CRC) Policy Proposals

First, the city should better promote the programs of buildings and businesses that are in compliance to help generate goodwill for those doing their part. The city should then begin to enforce the Ordinance immediately to send the message that recycling is important to the environmental, economic and reputational well-being of the city. The city can justify the cost of adding an enforcement agent to focus on education about, and enforcement of, the Ordinance first in areas in which there is a large number of high-density residential, office and other commercial buildings. Though the fines allowable under the Ordinance as it is currently written are low, they can be imposed for each day a building is not in compliance, and, therefore, citing properties that repeatedly fail to comply with the Ordinance could still justify the cost of such a position.

In the long-term, the Ordinance needs to be revised to increase fines to an amount that is commensurate with the seriousness of the offense. The city often fines those who illegally dump waste within city limits anywhere from \$1,000 to \$2,000. Failure to divert recyclable materials from being dumped in landfills and to use these valuable commodities to benefit the economic health of the city is analogous to illegal dumping, and should be treated as seriously.

Further, the city should research integrating pickup of recycling at these properties into the city's recycling program. Doing so could create cost-savings for both the city and the owners of buildings and businesses subject to the Ordinance. Having a city-run program would reduce wear and tear on city streets and alleys, decrease air pollution, noise pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as allow the city to benefit economically from collecting and selling these commodities.