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Zero Waste Case Study: San Francisco

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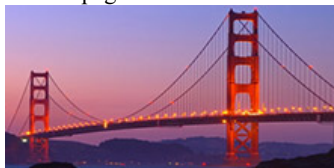
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Partnership

In 2002, San Francisco set a goal of 75% diversion by 2010 and Zero Waste by 2020. The city's comprehensive [Environment Code](#), created in 2003, is based on the [Precautionary Principle](#). The city's [Mandatory Recycling and Composting Ordinance](#), passed in 2009, requires all of San Francisco to separate recyclable materials, compostable materials and landfilled trash.

San Francisco implemented an innovative "[Fantastic Three](#)" [residential curbside collection program](#) that includes separate collection of commingled recyclables; compostable materials, including all food scraps, food-soiled paper and yard trimmings; and any remaining trash in three separate bins with various size and rate options.

Zero Waste is... sending nothing to landfill, incineration or high temperature technologies. We create policies and programs that reduce waste, and increase access to recycling and composting. SF Environment is doing everything we can to make it happen.

– *SF Environment*

The city implemented the first and largest urban food scraps composting collection program in the U.S., covering both commercial and residential sectors. San Francisco has collected more than a million tons of food scraps, yard trimmings, and other compostable materials and turned it into compost that is used by local farmers and wineries in Napa and Sonoma counties.

San Francisco diverted nearly 80% diversion in 2012 - the highest rate of any major U.S. city - and continues to implement innovative initiatives including:

- [Zero Waste Climate Action Planning](#)
 - Setting a Zero Waste Goal

- Reduce upstream waste through material management and producer responsibility policies
- [Single Use Plastic Checkout Bag Ban](#)
- [Food Service Waste Reduction Ordinance](#) (banning polystyrene and other non-recyclable, non-compostable food service items)
- [Zero Waste Textile Initiative](#)
- [Customizable Signs](#) for recycling, composting and landfilling
- [Construction and Demolition Debris Recovery Ordinance](#)
- [Event Recycling and Composting Requirement](#)
- [Cigarette Litter Abatement Ordinance \(PDF\)](#) (18 pp, 1.4MB, [About PDF](#))

Contractual Agreement

Instead of a contract, San Francisco and Recology, Inc. have a unique long-term ordinance where the city sets and approves the rates. The city's 1932 ordinance regulates collectors of discarded materials through 97 exclusive permit areas. Over time, Recology and its predecessor companies purchased all of the permits, resulting in the company becoming the exclusive collector of discarded materials for a fee within the city limits.

The city provides oversight, research and outreach while the service provider develops infrastructure, provides collection, processing and reporting. To insure success, San Francisco and Recology senior program managers maintain regular communication and meet weekly to oversee performance, review tasks and resolve outstanding issues.

Advantages

- **Strong Policy Leadership:** Strong political leadership and staff expertise have resulted in innovative policy initiatives, including: mandatory recycling and composting, plastic bag ban, food service ware ordinance and polystyrene ban, cigarette butt fee and state-of-the-art outreach programs covering residences, commercial, schools and events.
- **Approving and Setting Residential Refuse Rates Supports Collaboration and Flexibility:** Under the 1932 Refuse Collection and Disposal Initiative Ordinance, San Francisco's Director of Department of Public Works is responsible for reviewing the rate applications for any adjustments to residential refuse rates. Public hearings are held and a report is issued, recommending whether the rates are just and reasonable. Typically a rate application is submitted every five years. This allows the city and service provider to work collaboratively on programmatic development for several years between rate-making processes. Not conducting procurement processes or managing contracts and overseeing only one service provider simplifies administration, communications and information gathering. It allows programmatic flexibility, long-term planning and collaboration.
- **Rewards Generators and Service Provider for Reducing Waste:** Businesses receive a rate discount based on actual diversion, providing strong financial incentives reduce waste, recycle and compost.

Disadvantages/Omissions

- **Dependent on Ratemaking Process:** Since there is no contractual agreement, the city works with the service provider through the ratemaking process and on-going oversight.
- **Limited Competition:** The city's ordinance was affirmed by voters in 2012. The ordinance clearly limits competition; however, strong zero waste programs are currently being delivered.

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