

Business food scraps policy overview

Food is the largest component of our waste stream. Almost one-fifth of what we send to landfills is food that decays and creates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. In 2018, the Metro Council adopted a business food scraps separation requirement to capture the benefits of turning that material into energy and useful products.



For more than 10 years, Metro and local partners have been working to keep food scraps out of landfills and put them to better use. Programs were established to enable businesses in many cities to voluntarily separate their food scraps from their other garbage. Those food scraps are collected separately and converted to compost and energy.

Today about 1,400 businesses participate in this program voluntarily, but food scraps collection services are not available consistently throughout the metropolitan area, and a tremendous amount of food is still being sent to landfills. In July 2018, the Metro Council adopted a policy requiring the largest food service businesses to separate their food scraps from other garbage, with smaller food service businesses phased into the policy over subsequent years. The policy requires city and county governments, which oversee the collection of garbage and recycling, to ensure that food scraps collection services are available to businesses.

When does the requirement begin?

Policy implementation will begin on March 31, 2022 with the compliance deadline for the first group of businesses set for March 31, 2023. The policy was originally scheduled to begin in 2020, but Metro delayed the beginning of policy implementation due to the effects of COVID-19 on food businesses.

Why did the Metro Council adopt a food scraps separation requirement for businesses?

Food is the largest component of our region's garbage: about 18 percent of our overall disposed waste—more than any other material by far. Businesses are responsible for more than half of that – approximately 100,000 tons of food per year – and food scraps collection services for businesses are not offered consistently from city to city.

Collecting food scraps allows that material to be used to create clean energy as well as compost products that benefit farms, nurseries and gardens. Putting food scraps in the garbage is a missed opportunity to capture these benefits and make the most of this material.

Sending food scraps to the landfill is also an environmental concern. Food scraps are a primary contributor to the production of methane in landfills. Methane has a greenhouse gas impact at least 24 times that of carbon dioxide.

This isn't just a local priority. The state of Oregon has established a goal to prevent 50 percent of wasted food from ending up in the landfill by 2030. In addition, the Oregon Legislature recently amended recycling laws to encourage local governments to increase food waste prevention efforts and the recovery of food scraps from landfills.

Which businesses will be affected and how many?

This policy is focused only on businesses and organizations that process, cook or sell food and generate large quantities of food scraps: **restaurants, grocery stores, food manufacturers and processors, hospitals, hotels, nursing homes, colleges and universities, K-12 schools, catering, corporate cafeterias** and others. It does not apply to businesses outside of the food industry or to households.

This policy will be phased in over a period of three years and affect about 4,000 businesses in the food industry in the greater Portland area.

The quantity of food scraps a business generates determines whether it is subject to the policy and when it must begin separating food scraps from garbage.

Each business impacted by the requirement will receive a letter from their local government notifying them of their responsibilities, enforcement dates and how to get assistance. To connect with a local government representative, call 503-234-3000.

How will this policy be implemented?

This policy will be implemented in three phases:

- Group 1: Businesses that generate 1,000 pounds or more of food scraps (the equivalent of four 60-gallon roll carts) per week will be required to separate their food scraps for collection by March 31, 2023.

- Group 2: Businesses that generate 500 pounds or more of food scraps (the equivalent of two 60-gallon roll carts) per week will be required to separate their food scraps for collection by September 30, 2023.

- Group 3: Businesses that generate 250 pounds or more of food scraps (the equivalent of one 60-gallon roll cart) per week, along with K-12 schools, will be required to separate their food scraps for collection by September 30, 2024.

Businesses that create less than 250 pounds of food scraps per week will not be required to separate their food scraps from their garbage, but are encouraged to do so voluntarily.

What does it take to be in compliance with the requirement?

Businesses must set up food scrap collection service and separate food scraps, have correctly labeled bins for internal collection, and post accurate signs that show what is allowed in the bin.

It is important to note that the requirement only applies to food handled by employees. Businesses are not required to collect food waste that has been disposed of directly by customers.

Property owners and managers must allow the collection of food scraps by these businesses or help secure the service for lessees that are covered under the requirement.

Businesses are already required to recycle paper and plastic, metal and glass containers. This requirement makes food scrap collection required for food service businesses.

The values of a regional solid waste system

Through its stewardship of the greater Portland area's garbage and recycling system, Metro seeks to:

- Protect and restore the environment and promote health for all
- Conserve natural resources
- Advance environmental literacy
- Foster economic well-being for all communities
- Ensure operational resilience and adaptability
- Provide excellent service and equitable system access.

What types of food are included in the program?

The program is for food only: meat, dairy, fish, bread, pasta, coffee grounds, peels, shells, bones, spoiled food and plate scrapings.

Do NOT include liquids, paper products, packaging or anything that is not food. Compostable packaging and utensils are not allowed.

What will it cost?

Costs will vary by business and by community. Some businesses may see increases, some may find savings by using smaller garbage containers or starting waste prevention strategies. In some communities food scraps collection services, like recycling, may be included in one combined overall garbage rate.

What do businesses think?

In the three years leading up to the adoption of this regional policy, Metro staff met with food industry businesses, trade association leaders and local government partners to inform our planning process and design a system to best meet the needs of businesses and local governments.

In September 2016, a series of interviews and surveys were conducted with businesses in the region outside of Portland. Interviews included businesses currently participating in food scraps collection, businesses that previously participated but stopped, and those that were offered the service but declined it.

- Nearly 45 percent of businesses were in favor of a mandatory collection program; 15 percent had no strong concerns and would comply if required; 30 percent had some concerns about how it would work but were not opposed; and 10 percent were opposed.
- On-site assistance, containers and training materials provided by county and city government staff were highly valued by participants.
- Cost neutrality, space constraints, labor and concerns about cleanliness were the biggest concerns for non-participants.
- Most businesses said they wanted to reduce the garbage sent to the landfill and do something good for the environment. Saving money was not a sole consideration, but keeping costs close to neutral was important.

Do other communities have mandatory programs like the one the Metro Council adopted?

Yes; six states and 13 municipalities have some sort of mandatory food scraps separation program or a ban on the disposal of food in a landfill. Metro learned a lot from studying these other programs. Aside from the environmental benefits, many programs have also seen other positive trends such as increased donations of food to food banks.

Shouldn't businesses donate food instead?

Yes. Food that has been stored properly, is nutritious and fit for human consumption should be donated, and businesses that donate are eligible for federal tax deductions. However, most food service businesses have other food scraps such as trimmings, bones, shells, coffee grounds, food preparation waste and plate scrapings that are not edible and cannot be donated. Those food scraps are the focus of this policy.

The prevention of food waste and the donation of edible food are and will continue to be Metro's highest priority. City and county waste reduction staff can help businesses set up donation and waste prevention programs while assisting with food scraps collection. Learn more about donation and waste prevention at foodwastestopswithme.org

Are there adequate facilities to process the additional food scraps that will be collected from businesses?

Yes. Food scraps are already collected from area businesses and transported to two compost facilities in the Willamette Valley. These facilities currently have sufficient capacity to manage the increased volumes of food scraps that are anticipated from the implementation of this policy. Metro will continue to pursue additional facilities closer to the greater Portland area that can convert food scraps into useful products.

What about residential food scraps collection?

This requirement focuses on businesses, where the largest and most concentrated quantities of food scraps are produced. Metro supports the collection of residential food scraps, but does not require it.

Who can answer further questions about Metro's food scraps policy?

Please contact Holly Stirnkorb at holly.stirnkorb@oregonmetro.gov if you have questions about Metro's policy that are not addressed here. More information is also available on Metro's website at oregonmetro.gov/foodscrapspolicy