

How Denver Compares in Recycling

Eco-Cycle compared Denver to nine U.S. cities that also run their own trash, recycling and composting services. We found Denver lags behind its peer cities in many aspects of recycling, including:

- Current recycling rate
- Financial incentives to reduce waste (pay-as-you-throw and user fees)
- Participation in recycling programs
- Organics collection services
- Regulations on businesses and multi-family units
- Diversion goal

Comparable cities with municipally-run trash and recycling services for residents*

US Cities	
Austin, TX	Salt Lake City, UT
Charlotte, NC	San Antonio, TX
Fresno, CA	Seattle, WA
Milwaukee, WI	Washington, DC
Phoenix, AZ	

*Municipally-run trash and recycling is rarely provided to businesses or multi-family properties.

How CO Cities Handle Trash and Recycling Services

Denver is one of only five cities in Colorado that provides trash, recycling and compost services with city-run trucks and crew.

There are four ways a city can be involved with residential trash and recycling services:

Residential trash and recycling options	CO examples
Municipally-run trash, recycling and organics services	Denver, Longmont, Loveland
Contract with one or more trash and recycling haulers to provide services	Commerce City, Golden, Lafayette
Require all haulers to provide recycling or composting collection	Aspen, Boulder, Fort Collins
No oversight	Arvada, Aurora, Lakewood

Municipally-run trash and recycling services are rare in Colorado, but across the country, more than half of major U.S. cities provide municipally-run trash services to residents.

This means Denver's system is not what's holding the city back in improving its recycling rate. These comparable cities are showing Denver can greatly improve its recycling programs to help mitigate climate change and create green jobs.

How Denver Stacks Up Against Similar U.S. Cities with Municipally-Run Recycling Services

	Austin	Charlotte*	Fresno	Phoenix	Milwaukee	Salt Lake	San Antonio	Seattle	Wash. DC	Denver
<i>Recycling rate today</i>	42%	39%	71%	20%	25%	38%	30%	64%	26%	18%
<i>Diversion goal</i>	Zero Waste by 2040	58% by 2022	Zero Waste by 2025	40% by 2020	40% by 2020	Zero Waste by 2040	60% by 2025	70% by 2025	80%, date TBD	34% by 2020
<i>Recycling bin at every home</i>	✓	No; bans plastic bottles, aluminum cans in trash	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Organics services for food and yard debris</i>	Free; yard only	Free; yard only	Free; food/yard	Subscription fee; yard only	Free, seasonal; yard only	Free; food/yard	Free; food/yard	Required, fee-based; food/yard		Subscription fee; food/yard
<i>Pay As You Throw rates</i>	✓		Extra cart fee	Partial	Extra cart fee	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Households billed directly for services</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<i>MFUs and businesses required to recycle</i>	✓	Cardboard, paper, beverage containers	✓		✓	Large MFUs, businesses	MFUs only	✓	✓	

*Includes Mecklenburg County

Based on 2014-2016 programs and services.

Sources

Austin, TX

Recycling rate: 42%. [Austin's 2015 Community Diversion Study](#)
City of Austin [Universal Recycling Ordinance](#)
City of Austin, [Austin Resource Recovery](#)

Charlotte, NC

Recycling rate: 38.9%. [Mecklenburg County Solid Waste Characterization Study, Fall 2015](#)
City of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County, [Garbage and Recycling](#)

Denver, CO

Recycling rate: 17.7%. Denver Public Works, Solid Waste Management, [Denver Recycles, 2015 Annual Report](#)
City and County of Denver, [Trash and Recycling](#)

Fresno, CA

Recycling rate: 71%. City of Fresno, "[Fresno Named Top in the Nation for Recycling](#),"
US Environmental Protection Agency, "[Less Waste Case Study: Fresno, CA](#),"
City of Fresno, [Solid Waste Management Division](#)

Milwaukee, WI

Recycling rate: 24.9%. City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works, "[2014 DPW Annual Residential Recycling Report](#)," submitted 9/28/15.
City of Milwaukee, [Milwaukee Recycles](#)

Phoenix, AZ

Recycling rate: 20%. City of Phoenix, Public Works, [Reimagine Phoenix](#), 2015
City of Phoenix, [Recycling and Diversion Programs](#)

Salt Lake City, UT

Recycling rate: 38.2%. Salt Lake City, SLCGreen, [State of Sustainability 2015](#),
Salt Lake City, Sustainability Department, [SLCGreen](#)

San Antonio, TX

Recycling rate: 30%. City of San Antonio, [Sustainability Plan](#)
City of San Antonio, [Solid Waste Management Department](#)

Seattle, WA

Recycling rate: 63.9%. Seattle Public Utilities, [2015 Recycling Rate Report](#), July 1, 2016;
Seattle Public Utilities, [Recycling Services](#)

Washington, DC

Recycling rate: 25.9%. [Public Solid Waste Services in the Washington Metropolitan Region](#),
District of Columbia Department of Public Works, [DC Residential Recycling Collection](#)