

# The Best Way to Reduce Waste and Increase Recycling in Denver: Volume-Based Pricing for Trash

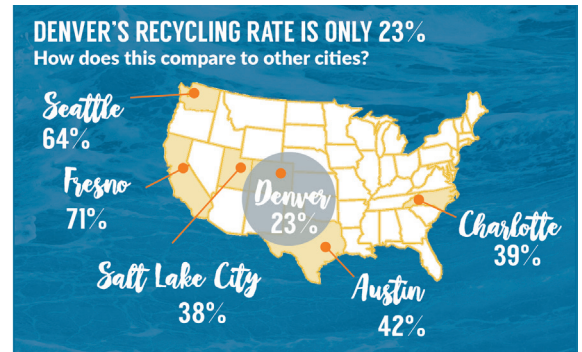
How can Denver achieve its recycling goals?

The first step is to change the way the city charges for trash service.



## DENVER IS FALLING BEHIND ON RECYCLING

When it comes to recycling, Colorado and the City of Denver are sadly some of the most wasteful places in the country. Colorado recycles only 17% of our materials, compared to the national average of 35%. Denver does not fare much better, recycling only 23%. Denver needs to take bold actions now to reach its goal of a 34% recycling rate, and it starts with changing how the city pays for trash collection.



Denver's recycling rate lags far behind its peer cities, in part because it lacks a Volume-Based Pricing system.

In 2018, Denver residents landfilled

**171,516**

tons of materials



**BUT AT LEAST 75% OF THOSE MATERIALS COULD HAVE BEEN RECYCLED OR COMPOSTED\***

## CRITICAL NEXT STEP: CHARGING FOR TRASH

Denver residents all pay the same rate for trash service, regardless of whether a household puts out five bags of trash per week or only one bag per month. Not only is this unfair and inequitable, it also does not create any motivation for residents to recycle or compost. In fact, residents who want to compost actually have to pay more, which creates a barrier to participation instead of an incentive.

A better solution is for Denver to implement a volume-based pricing system for trash. This system charges households for trash service based on the size of their trash cart; the more trash you produce, the more you pay.

Volume-based pricing for trash creates a fairer, more equitable pricing system that gives residents a direct financial incentive to recycle and compost more. It's the same way residents are charged for other utilities — such as electricity, gas and water — based on how much they use. **Volume-Based Pricing for trash is one of the most effective policies for increasing recycling and reducing waste.**

## VOLUME-BASED PRICING FOR TRASH IS A PROVEN SOLUTION

More than 9,000 communities across the U.S. use Volume-Based Pricing to provide fair, cost-effective trash services and encourage recycling, serving nearly 40% of residents nationwide. Nine Front Range cities have successful Volume-Based Pricing programs, including Loveland, which leads the state with a 61% recycling rate. Volume-Based Pricing is a key factor in the successful recycling programs among Denver's peer cities, such as Austin, TX and Salt Lake City, UT, which both recycle nearly twice as much as Denver.



## MYTH

IT'S OKAY TO THROW APPLES, GRASS CLIPPINGS AND OTHER BIODEGRADABLE MATERIALS IN THE LANDFILL BECAUSE THEY BREAK DOWN.

## FACT



BIODEGRADABLE MATERIALS CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS WHEN LANDFILLED.

Because there is no oxygen in the landfill once it's covered, biodegradable materials decompose anaerobically. This process creates methane, a powerful greenhouse gas (GHG) that traps 84 times more heat in our atmosphere than carbon dioxide. When you compost organic material instead, not only does it limit methane production, but it can be used to build healthy soils that can sequester more carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. Soils can store 3x more carbon than trees!

## BENEFITS OF VOLUME-BASED PRICING IN DENVER

### Increase Equity & Fairness

Volume-Based Pricing is more transparent and equitable than charging a flat fee because residents pay only for the level of service they use, just like other utilities. Households that produce less trash, and recycle more, pay less.

For every one ton of materials that Denver recycles, we save three tons of carbon pollution. That makes Volume-Based Pricing one of the most cost-effective strategies to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

### Provide Composting to All Residents

Half of what residents' throw away in Denver is organic materials (e.g. leaves, grass clippings, and food scraps) that could have been composted instead of landfilled. Yet only ten percent of Denver households have a curbside composting cart because it costs an additional \$10/month. **This pricing system is backwards; residents should be encouraged to compost to reduce waste and climate pollution, not charged more.** Leading U.S. cities provide composting and recycling to residents at no extra charge, and charge more for trash service. **By transitioning to a Volume-Based Pricing system, Denver can then roll-out a city-wide composting service at no extra charge to residents.**

### Stop Using Tax Dollars to Subsidize Wasting

Denver's trash and recycling services are paid for through the city's General Fund, which is funded primarily through sales taxes and some property taxes. Denver residents currently do not pay a direct bill for trash and recycling. **Businesses contribute heavily to the General Fund, which means their tax dollars are being used to support a wasteful system that does not provide them with any services or value.** In addition to paying taxes, businesses have to contract and pay for their own trash hauling, unlike residents. Denver residents that recycle and do their part to reduce waste are paying just as much in taxes as neighboring households that produce large amounts of trash. This creates further inequities, with those producing less trash subsidizing those who produce more trash.

By charging residents for trash service, similar to how the city charges residents for water and other utilities, **tax dollars are freed up in the General Fund to be used for other city services that provide greater quality of life in local neighborhoods.** Surveys show residents want more and better sidewalks, more trees to add shade, expanded safety services with police and fire departments, and traffic control to make the streets more walkable. These services are what make a city great, not the price of trash service.

## HELP DENVER REACH ITS RECYCLING AND CLIMATE GOALS THROUGH VOLUME-BASED PRICING FOR TRASH!

We need passionate residents and businesses to push the city to make Volume-Based Pricing for trash a priority action. Learn more about what you can do at [www.ecocycle.org/ZeroWasteDenver](http://www.ecocycle.org/ZeroWasteDenver) or contact Jasmin Barco at [jasmin@ecocycle.org](mailto:jasmin@ecocycle.org)

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