

Recycling may be mandatory but it doesn't have to be difficult

Convenient Recycling (SDUT)

Alan Pentico - Executive Director of The San Diego County Apartment Association

Mandatory recycling requirements for multifamily properties are not new. AB 1826 was signed into law in 2014 and continues to be phased into full implementation today. The legislation set its sights high: by 2020 Californians will be diverting 50% or more of their organic waste from landfills, if all goes according to plan. Renters and their property managers at apartment units factor significantly into these goals.

Californians have used separate recycling bins for decades. Existing recycling laws apply to renters and help divert waste from landfills in addition to reducing overall costs at a property. The Renter's Right to Recycle Act was signed into law in 2011 and requires paper, plastic, can and bottle recycling at multifamily properties. As the new requirements take effect, renters should get in the habit of following a few more steps in their recycling process.

For renters at multifamily dwellings of at least five units, the requirement is now to recycle organics, solid waste, green waste and landscaping spoils. However, recyclers looking to use best practices in sorting their waste should remember that containers and other food waste should not be included in recycling. Greasy pizza boxes will need to find another home.

Good sorting habits help save time and make managing different refuse types easy. Giving a quick rinse to drink containers can help avoid pests in an

apartment and avoiding tossing junk mail into the trash will help landfills from filling up.

The bill that mandated these recycling standards also asks individual City and County governments to report every year on their organic waste programs to the state's recycling department, CalRecycle. Your jurisdiction is on the hook for their recycling performance and should have submitted their 2017 report on August 1.

So what happens between now and the final deadline in 2020? And how can renters and apartment management ease the process for themselves?

While CalRecycle continues to review the policy's implementation statewide through Fall of 2018, residents in apartment properties should be gearing up for the policy's next phase. By January 1, 2019 multifamily dwellings that produce 4-cubic yard of waste per week, the smaller end of most multi-unit properties, are required to arrange for organic waste recycling services in addition to recycling for their green waste, landscaping leftovers and nonhazardous wood waste. How does this impact tenants?

Most renters are not handling tree trimming or grass mowing, but their property manager should be able to find a reputable local landscaping firm that uses green recycling policies. Additionally, landscape companies that haul waste off-site for recycling reduce the presence of attractive breeding grounds for gnats and pests that gravitate towards spoiled plant matter. As of now, multifamily properties are not required to have a food waste diversion program in place so there is no need for renters to set aside food scraps and food-soiled paper. However, with more jurisdictions looking at "Zero Waste" plans, sourcing your food waste and composting could be a reality in the not too far future.

While California policy makers await the final tally of AB 1826's effectiveness, renters can take proactive action now and establish good habits to ensure they

are in compliance with their jurisdiction's recycling ordinances. If protecting the environment is not incentive enough to practice waste management, helping your rental property avoid fines and additional costs certainly should be.

If you or your rental property have unique or effective recycling practices, share them with us via Twitter @SDCAA or Instagram SDCAA1.

- Alan Pentico is executive director of the San Diego County Apartment Association.