

**WE ARE
ZERO WASTE BOULDER**



**Universal Zero Waste Ordinance
Compliance Guidebook**



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Chapter 1: What's the UZWO?

Meet the Universal Zero Waste Ordinance: what it is, why it exists and what it means for you.

On June 16, 2015, Boulder City Council adopted the Universal Zero Waste Ordinance (Boulder Revised Code [Title 6, Chapter 3](#) and [Title 6, Chapter 12](#)) that seeks to expand the availability of recycling and composting options for all Boulder residents, employees and visitors.

The City of Boulder's goal is to reach 85% diversion by 2025, meaning 85% of Boulder's waste will be recycled, composted or reused rather than going to the landfill. This guidebook aims to help property owners and businesses understand the Universal Zero Waste Ordinance and comply with ordinance requirements.



Chapter 2: Property Owners

Understand how to meet Universal Zero Waste Ordinance requirements and responsibilities for property owners. After completing the actions listed in this chapter, property owners will have satisfied ordinance requirements.

Subscribe to Collection Services

Contact a local waste hauler to sign up for recycling, trash and/or compost collection service. A hauler can also recommend appropriate levels of service, such as bin and dumpster sizes and frequency of waste pickups.

Please see [this list of haulers](#) with contact information and the services they provide.

The city does not determine or control rates, nor does the city dictate appropriate levels of service for customers. The city encourages customers to ask for quotes from multiple haulers.

Place Carts and Dumpsters for Collection

If recycling, trash and compost containers do not fit together in an enclosure or area, and bins are more than 15 feet apart from each other, directional signs pointing to outlying bins must be posted on or near the waste collection area.



Signs and Education

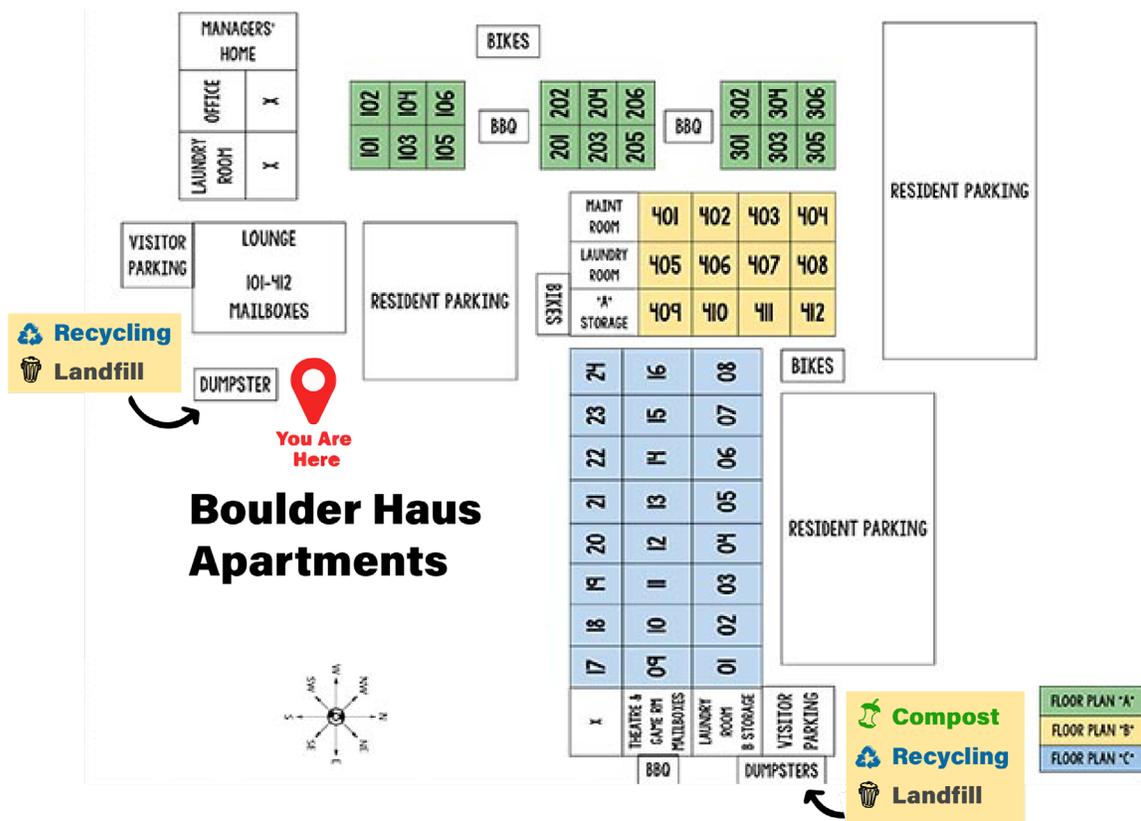
To ensure that tenants and residents know how to correctly use recycling and composting services, it's essential that:

- They know that the services exist.
- They know the location(s) of dumpsters and carts.
- Correct signs are placed on dumpsters and carts.
- They are educated regularly.

A sorting sign must accompany each container. Haulers must attach stickers to all hauler-owned containers. If your bin is missing signs, it is your responsibility to contact your property manager and/or hauler.

Education is the responsibility of property owners, both commercial and residential. Tenants must be educated on bin location, waste pickup schedules and proper waste sorting annually *and* during move-in. Property maps depicting the locations of required services must be provided. You may also choose to have trainings conducted by your contracted recycling or compost hauler, or another third party.

Example of a residential property map depicting waste disposal locations (this can also be done for commercial properties):



Training is also required for employees, custodial contractors, landscapers and other service providers responsible for collection of recyclables, compostables and trash on the property. See [Chapter 6](#) to learn more about training and available resources.

Best Practices:

- Your hauler should provide carts and/or dumpsters for recyclables and compostables wherever trash dumpsters or carts are located.
- When recycling, compost and landfill containers do not fit into one enclosure or waste disposal area, property maps depicting container locations can be posted to meet the directional sign requirement, as well as the requirement to provide maps to new tenants upon move-in.
- For restaurants and other food service businesses: if your property generates more than eight yards of waste per week, you should be able to reduce the size of your trash dumpster and/or the frequency of collection by increasing your collection of compostables and recyclables.

Chapter 3: Food Businesses

Learn the requirements and best practices for food businesses like restaurants, grocery stores and dining halls, including how to set up waste stations for both front-of-house and back-of-house areas. Food businesses are required to separate recyclables and compostables from the trash, provide properly placed signs and containers, and train employees on proper sorting in all back-of-house areas. If the business has a self-bussing dining area, separate recycling and trash bins with proper signage and/or labels must be provided front-of-house. Additionally, food businesses are required to annually report ordinance compliance.

Front-of-house Dining Areas and Other Customer-facing Areas

You will need bins for recycling and trash in your dining area. Clear and visible waste sorting stations are especially important if you have a “self-bussing” restaurant where customers are clearing their own tables.

Important: Boulder businesses are no longer required to provide front-of-house compost bins until further notice. Want to keep compost collection available to customers? You must follow these [new standards and practices](#) to avoid contamination.



All front-of-house bins must be clearly labeled. Signs are available for free from the city. You can also request custom signs featuring items you serve to encourage proper sorting and to help reduce contamination. See [Chapter 5](#) for more information on signs.



Group bins together into a waste sorting station so that customers are aware of all bin options. If your bins are not grouped together, directional signs should be placed on waste containers more than 15 feet apart from one another to help guide customers to all sorting options.

If food trucks wish to provide a trash can, they must also provide a recycling bin.

Back-of-house Areas and Other Employee-Only Facing Areas

All food businesses must have recycling, compost and trash bins in employee-only areas. Unlike front-of-house areas, these bins do not have to be placed together. For example, a lone cardboard bin may be placed in an un-boxing area or a single compost bin may be placed in a food preparation area. All bins must have signs. If you choose to use descriptive languages on your signs rather than just pictures, you can use English, Spanish or any other language that is commonly used by the employees. For more information on signs, see [Chapter 5](#).

Reporting

Food businesses are required to annually report ordinance compliance by submitting a Zero Waste Reporting Form. See [Chapter 7](#) for more information on reporting.

Best Practices:

- Custom signs featuring the items you serve will encourage proper sorting. The city can provide you with customized signage for free.
- Restaurants should have a conveniently located compost container for waitstaff to scrape food waste, paper napkins and other compostable items into.
- You are not required to separately collect compostable paper towels in customer restrooms, but if you choose to do so, the compost container must be accompanied by a trash bin. Both must be clearly labeled.



Chapter 4: Non-Food Businesses

Find out the responsibilities of non-food business owners, such as offices and retail stores. These businesses are required to separate recyclables and compostables from the trash, provide properly placed signs and containers, and train employees on correct sorting. This chapter will explain how to set up compliant waste stations in non-food businesses.

Offices and Retail



Office spaces with multiple work stations should have one, centrally located waste area with clearly labeled recycling, compost and landfill containers. Employees can empty small, separated waste containers into these larger bins. See [Chapter 5](#) for examples of proper bins and signs.

Employees must also be trained on how to properly sort their waste. For more information on employee training, see [Chapter 6](#).





Best Practices:

- Individual desks, work stations, copy machines and printers should have containers for recyclables, but may not need a trash or compost container at each location. However, a small container for collecting food scraps, tissues and other compostables is encouraged.
- Consider lining compost containers with compostable bags (BPI certified compostable or paper bags) or washing unlined containers regularly. Plastic garbage bags CANNOT be put in your compost collection bin.
- The city offers a free monthly subscription for compostable bags through its Green Bag Giveaway program, paid for by the Disposable Bag Fee. To qualify, Boulder businesses of all types need to fill out [an application](#).
- Whether it's a lunch room, break room or full commercial kitchen, most of the waste generated within a kitchen is food waste. Set up compost collection containers in the kitchen near high-use locations like the dishwasher, sink or food prep areas.
- Have a place to consolidate corrugated cardboard for recycling wherever your inventory gets unpacked.

Chapter 5: Setting up your Indoor Zero Waste Stations

Learn how to set up your indoor zero waste stations with proper bins and signs.

Bins

There are no requirements on the type of bins your business needs to use to be compliant. Choose the best size and bin style for your business to ensure adequate capacity for the waste streams generated.

Signs

All containers must have signs or labels on or above them to easily identify which materials go in each container.

Front-of-house signs must announce the type of waste being collected (recycle, compost or landfill) and an image (photographic or iconographic) that represents it. Descriptions must be in both English and Spanish if you choose to identify individual items on signs rather than just pictures or icons.

Back-of-house signs must also indicate the type of waste being collected. You may use English or any other language that is commonly used by the employees as long as they also contain pictures of materials commonly found in the businesses' waste streams.

While businesses may use whatever types of signs they choose within the requirements, the city has free signs available and can make custom signs tailored to your business. Custom signs can include logos, branding and unique materials created by your business (e.g., specific coffee cups or packaging). These signs are especially helpful if you have a self-bussing restaurant where customers sort their own waste.

Please email zerowaste@bouldercolorado.gov to obtain free laminated signs and/or bin stickers, or for information on custom signage. There are also printable PDFs of stock signs available on the [UZWO](#) website.

City-Provided Front-of-House Signs



City-Provided Back-of-House Bin Stickers



Best Practices:

- When possible, buy green bins for compost, blue for recycling, and black or gray for trash. This makes sorting easier when employees and customers are in a hurry.
- Using liners in your bins keeps them cleaner, but plastic bags must be kept out of the compost. Plastic bags of any kind cannot be recycled in your dumpster. If you choose to use liners in recycling containers for easy collection and cleaning maintenance, make sure the contents of the bag are emptied into the recycling bin and the liner is placed in the trash bin or reused until no longer effective.
- Consider using compostable bags (BPI certified compostable or paper bags) for cleaner compost collection. Or forget the liner and wash your containers regularly since plastic garbage bags cannot be put in the compost.

Chapter 6: Employee or Tenant Training

Learn how to train and educate your employees and tenants. All employees must watch the training video and take the sorting quiz. Training helps ensure compostables are actually composted and recyclables are made into new materials.

Watch Training Videos

The city has a series of videos that will teach your employees how to set up work areas and properly sort waste so everything ends up in the right bin.

Each employee must watch the sorting 101 video in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

Find other helpful videos for businesses and custodial contractors in English and Spanish [on the city's website](#).

Take the Sorting Quiz

Each employee must take a sorting quiz at [boulder.recycle.game](#). It is the responsibility of the owner to ensure certificates of completion are kept on file.

Keep Records

It is important to keep track of which employees have been trained and training dates. Conduct trainings on an annual basis and when new hires come on board.

Train Custodians and Janitors

If your business manages its own custodial contract, share our video resource for custodial contractors posted on the [UZWO](#) webpage . Make sure janitorial staff separate the three waste streams and place waste in appropriate outside containers.

Best Practices:

- If liners are used in recycling containers for easy collection and cleaning maintenance, make sure tenants, employees and custodial contractors empty the contents of the bag into the recycling bin. The liner should be placed in the trash or reused until no longer effective.

Chapter 7: Reporting Compliance

Understand the annual reporting requirement for businesses, who is required to report, deadlines and how to report.

Note: Reporting requirements were suspended in 2020 and 2021, and reinstated in 2022.

Who Needs to Report and Deadlines

In 2022, restaurants and grocery stores were again required to report compliance. The deadline to report was August 31, 2022. Future compliance reporting information and deadlines will be updated on the Universal Zero Waste Ordinance webpage once determined.

Businesses that do not meet reporting deadlines are assumed to be noncompliant. These businesses will be subject to enforcement action and may receive fines. See Chapter 9 for more details on enforcement.

How to Report Compliance

To report compliance, businesses must complete the city's [Zero Waste Reporting Form](#). You will be required to attach photos of your waste stations, containers and signs as part of the application. Applications without proper photos will be declined. For more information, visit the [UZWO](#) webpage.

Reporting compliance makes you eligible for our [Green Bag Giveaway](#), a free monthly subscription for compostable bin liners.



Chapter 8: Exemptions

In certain cases, a business or property owner may apply for an exemption from ordinance requirements. To be granted an exemption, applicants must demonstrate that they have considered all reasonable options to bring their business or property into compliance.

To Apply for an Exemption

Apply for an exemption through the [Zero Waste Reporting Form](#) from [Chapter 6](#). The city will review your application and contact you. Depending on the exemption type, you may be required to complete a self-certification form, provide proof of service and/or the city may conduct a site visit to determine eligibility.

Types of Exemptions

Generally, exemptions expire one year from the date granted. Renewal requests will be accepted for review during the annual reporting period for that year, except as otherwise detailed.

These are the types of exemptions available:

- Home-Based Business
- Self-Haul
- Shared Collection
- Economic Hardship
- Compost On-Site
- Space Constraints
- Innovation
- De Minimis Volume

Exemption descriptions are listed [here](#). Review exemption descriptions to see if you qualify before applying.

Chapter 9: Enforcement

Learn about enforcement and fines associated with noncompliance.

Enforcement

Enforcement of the ordinance began June 17, 2017, one year after the ordinance went into effect. Enforcement is handled by the Climate Initiatives Department and the Code Enforcement Division of the Police Department.

When the city becomes aware of noncompliance, either through a complaint, failure to report compliance when required or inspection of the premises, a two-warning process begins prior to a fine. The first warning is a 30-day Notice of Pending Violation letter sent by Climate Initiatives staff.

If the steps to become compliant are not completed within the 30 days allowed, the case will be referred to Code Enforcement at the Police Department for further investigation.

If compliance is not achieved within 14 days of Code Enforcement opening an investigation, a fine of \$500 will be assessed, followed by second fine of \$1000, then fines of \$2000 for each occurrence, if compliance is not reached upon subsequent 14-day inspections.

Chapter 10: Resources

We Are Here to Help

The city has created a number of resources to help you successfully comply with the Universal Zero Waste Ordinance.

Introduction and Set Up Videos

- Learn more about the Universal Zero Waste Ordinance in our [UZWO introduction video](#).
- Check out our videos for [businesses](#) and [property owners](#) to learn what you need to do to comply.
- Set up your restaurant, cafe or bar for zero waste success with our “how-to” video for food related businesses in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).
- Set up your office or retail space for zero waste success with our “how-to” [video for office or retail businesses](#).
- Watch our video resource for custodial contractors in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

Check out the [UZWO](#) webpage for more information.

Still have questions or need help? Contact us!

Email zerowaste@bouldercolorado.gov or call [303-441-1931](tel:303-441-1931) to request assistance.