

## It Ain't Easy Being Green...

### But it's Worth the Effort!

**Google** reasons to recycle and you will find about 150 different Top Reasons to Recycle matches. All of them are valid and make good economic sense. At one time or another as the debate over mandatory multifamily recycling was developing we have seen them touted by one faction or another. But have you ever really stopped to look and think about those lists? There are some amazing facts embedded in the lists especially when you expand them to the demographics of your property. Look at what happens to the list in a community wide view.

- The average American man, woman and child will generate between 4.5 and 7.5 lbs. of solid waste a day. Let's split the middle and say 6 lbs. A family of 4 will put 720 lbs. of solid waste in your compactor each month or if you extend it, 8640 lbs. per year.
- That same average family consumes 182 gallons of soda, 29 gallons of juice, 104 gallons of milk, & 26 gallons of bottled water a year, most of it in recyclable containers. That's a lot of space and weight out of your compactor.
- 84% of all household trash is recyclable. If your residents recycled even ½ of that it would reduce that 720 lbs. to about 360 lbs. What would that do to your waste hauling cost?
- An aluminum drink can placed in a landfill will be an aluminum drink can 500 years from now. There is no limit to the number of times aluminum cans may be recycled.
- Every ton of paper we recycle saves 17 trees. The amount of paper and wood we throw away every year is enough to heat 50 million homes for 20 years. How many tons of paper are you paying to haul off every year?
- Recycling lowers costs of the goods we buy and high resident participation lowers your hauling and cleanup cost. How much staff time is spent picking up trash spilled on the way to the and around the compactor that just does not quite make it in the door of the compactor?

Now for the hard part. It is notoriously difficult to get apartment residents to "Buy In" to recycling programs. *The critical factor is making it as absolutely easy as possible for them.* They don't want to sort, clean or separate the items to go in the recycle bag. That is why it is critical to have a single stream recycling resource. Single Stream means that the items placed in the recycle bin don't have to be sorted, that is done by the recycler. Most of the larger markets have single stream recycle operations. You can't put regular household trash in the recycle bag. It has to be made very clear to the residents what CAN and what CAN'T be placed in the recycle bag. That is why the recycle bags are blue translucent bags, so you can see what is in them. If your recycle items are contaminated with other trash the recycler can penalize your property or stop accepting your items. Most single stream recyclers require that recycled items be "clean". A half full milk jug or egg carton with shells and such are not clean items, your recycle provider will provide a list of unacceptable items.

Some properties require the residents to purchase the recycle bags themselves. The most successful properties provide the bags at cost or free to the resident. One manager buys the bags at Wal-Mart in 100 count boxes and gives each resident a year's supply (52) at move in. The resident can buy more bags as needed. There is also a website (<http://www.apartmentrecyclebags.com/servlet/StoreFront>) where residents or properties can buy bags at a very good price.

It appears that the properties with the highest level of resident participation make the process easier by providing the residents with curbside or at the door trash and recycle pick-up. This service can be done with in-house staff or by a vendor. When the resident doesn't have to haul their bags to the compactor or dumper in the rain, heat or cold they are much more willing to take part in the recycle program. In most cases if the service provided by an "At the Door" refuse vendor it can also be a profit center for the property. This eliminates one of the pit-falls of recycling, the mixing or contamination of your recycle bins. If your residents are taking their bags to the compactor or dumper it is almost inevitable that they will place raw trash in the recycle bin. If you or a vendor is doing the pick-up you can keep the recycle bin closed or locked.

The most important element in making your recycling program work is the education of the residents. A detailed written explanation of how the program works in the move-in package along with a discussion at lease signing. They must be told exactly what can and can't be placed in the recycle bag. For your current residents provide written rules and take any opportunity to discuss the program with them. Your residents watch the news on TV and they know that the city has mandated recycling and it is not a matter of choice for the property.

In the big picture recycling will be a plus for your property, the reduction in the amount of solid waste in your compactor will cut your hauling cost dramatically. The addition of curbside or at the door pick-up can add to your bottom line and most important recycling will keep you in compliance with the city mandate.

©Larry Lee Duncan 2011

By Larry Duncan, CAPS, CAMT, CAS Emeritus  
Lead Consultant  
Larry Duncan Consulting & Mentoring  
He can be contacted at 972.342.0442 or at [larryleeduncan@lduncantx.com](mailto:larryleeduncan@lduncantx.com)