

Single Stream Recycling for Multi-unit Buildings (>4 units) in Chicago – as of spring, 2008

Single-stream recycling. Single-stream recycling is a process of collecting recyclable materials in a single, “co-mingled” collection process and delivering them directly to a separating and recycling facility. Within large residential buildings, cardboard, newspaper, glass, plastic and aluminum are all collected in a single collection container. A recycling service provider picks up the recyclable materials, usually once a week, and takes the materials directly to a recycling processing facility. While the truck may be the same type of truck used for garbage collection, the recycling truck never goes to the landfill. It only goes to the recycling processing facility. It is usually scheduled for a different pick up day than the building’s garbage collection.

At the recycling processing facility, (there are three in the Chicago area), the trucks unload and huge, very sophisticated machines separate the recyclables. The machines are so sophisticated they can distinguish between different types of plastic (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7; most do not take 6). From there, the sorted materials are sold as commodities and go to manufacturing facilities to be made into new products.

Chicago’s Single Stream Pilot Project has worked with six vendors. Each vendor has a slightly different approach. Their range of services is usually tied to the processing facility that they use. These are the vendors and their capabilities:

- Allied Waste (which includes National) (doesn’t accept glass; only Plastics 1 &2)
- Groot Services (accepts glass paper metal p1, p2, p4, p6)
- Lake Shore (everything but no P6)
- Premier (everything but no P6)
- Waste Management (everything but no P6)
- Veolia (paper, glass metal; p1, p2)

Single-stream processing is fairly new to everyone, including the sales personnel at these vendors. Here is a suggested process for contacting vendors:

Call your current vendor. Ask the following questions:

- Do you provide single-stream recycling? (If the person hesitates, you have the wrong person. Ask to speak to the head of their recycling program. If they don’t have a specific person in charge, that is probably an indication.)
- Where do you take your recyclables? Ask for a specific location. (There are three facilities. If they cannot give you an address, you are speaking to the wrong person or they don’t use single-stream recycling.)
- How do you collect recyclables? (Anyone who mentions a blue bag doesn’t know about single stream. The vendor should tell you that it is a separate collection.)
- What can you recycle? This depends on the recycling process facility that the scavenger is using.
- Let your waste hauler know that you are working with Rae Mindock’s project. That may also help to get you to the right person.

What’s in it for condo associations? Think of the carrot and stick approach. The stick may be coming. City plans a new ordinance. If you don’t have a REAL, EFFECTIVE, auditable recycling program, you will not qualify for refuse rebate. A carrot is the fact that recycling is almost always less expensive than landfill waste hauling.

What is success? In the pilot program, City is measuring recycling before and after changes are made. They will have real data. Because waste haulers charge a building by number of pickups (referred to as “pulls”), rather than by weight, a building pays the same for partially filled containers or full containers. Many buildings find that they can reduce the number of garbage “pulls” for which they contract. Generally speaking, the cost of a separate recycling “pull” is about equal to the cost of a regular garbage pickup.

