

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 the 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 to 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 the 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 service levels, such as size of bins and dumpsters and frequency of pick-up.

Please see [this list of haulers](#) with contact information and the services they can provide. You can contract with multiple haulers to provide pick up of different materials.

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 the recycling, trash and compost containers do not fit into one enclosure or area and the outlying bin is more than 15 feet away, directional signs addressing the outlying bin must be posted on or near the waste collection enclosure or area.



Best Practices:

- Wherever your trash dumpsters or carts are located, your hauler should also provide carts and/or dumpsters for recyclables and compostables.
- When the recycling, compost and landfill containers do not fit into one enclosure or waste disposal area, property maps depicting the locations of required services can be posted as signs 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 – prior to sorting your waste – your property generates more than approximately eight yards of waste per week, you should be able to reduce the size of your trash dumpster or the frequency of collection at the same time you increase collection for compostables and recyclables.

Chapter 3: Food-Based Businesses

Learn the requirements and best practices for food-based 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-based businesses are required to separate recyclables and compostables from the trash, provide properly placed signs and containers and train their employees on proper sorting in all back-of-house areas. If the business has a self-busing dining area, then there must also be a three-bin zero waste station and proper signs and/or labels front-of-house. Additionally, food-based businesses are required to annually report ordinance compliance. (Note: The compliance reporting requirement has been suspended for 2021.)

Front-of-house Dining Areas and Other Public Facing Areas

When setting up bins in your dining area, you will need bins for all three waste streams. Clear and visible waste stations are especially important if you have a “self-busing” restaurant where customers are clearing their own tables.



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



Group bins together into a zero waste station. If all the containers cannot be grouped in one area and the outlying bin is more than fifteen feet away from the zero waste station, then you must use a directional sign. This type of sign will help direct customers to all their options. A directional sign should be placed on the outlying bin with directions to the zero waste station and the zero waste station should have a sign referring to the outlying bin. If food trucks or mobile food vehicles wish to provide a trash can, they must also provide a recycling and compost bin.

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

All food-based 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 in a station together within the employee-only areas, if it is more efficient to arrange the bins as needed. For example, a lone cardboard bin may be placed in an un-boxing area and a lone 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

In addition to meeting ordinance requirements, food-based businesses are required to annually report ordinance compliance by submitting a Zero Waste Reporting Form. For more information on reporting, see [Chapter 7](#).

Note: The compliance reporting requirement has been suspended for 2021.

Best Practices:

- Custom signs featuring the items you serve will reduce contamination when sorting and encourage proper sorting. The city can provide you with this type of sign for free.
- Restaurants should have a conveniently located compost container for waitstaff to scrape food waste, napkins and other compostable items into.
- Bathrooms should have containers for compostables such as paper towels and tissues. It is often possible to convert the current waste container to compost only and place a small trash container beside it, or in the restroom stalls.



Chapter 4: Non-Food-Based Businesses

Find out the responsibilities of non-food-based 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 their employees on proper sorting. This chapter will explain how to set up your business properly.

Offices and Retail



Office spaces with multiple workstations should have one, centrally located waste area with properly labeled recycling, compost, and landfill containers. Employees can empty individual recycling, compost, or landfill containers into these larger bins. For examples of proper bins and signs see [Chapter 5](#).

In addition to requiring bins and signs for general use in a central area, employees must 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 necessarily need a trash container at each location. A compost bin is not required at each workstation, though a small container for collecting food scraps, tissues, etc., is encouraged.
- For compost containers, consider using compostable bags (BPI certified compostable or paper bags) or using no liner and washing your containers regularly since plastic garbage bags CANNOT be put in your compost dumpster.
- The City of Boulder 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 simply need to fill out [the application](#) which shows they are composting and recycling.
- Whether it's a lunch room, break room or a 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.
- It is convenient to 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 setup 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 the capacity is adequate for the waste streams generated.

Signs

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

Front-of-house signs must contain the title of the waste stream being collected (recycle, compost, landfill) in addition to an image (photographic or iconographic) depicting the proper waste stream intended for collection. If you choose to specifically identify individual items on your signs rather than just pictures or icons, the descriptions must be in both English and Spanish.

Back-of-house signs must contain a title – recycle, compost, landfill. 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 also make custom signs tailored to your business, including logos, branding and unique materials that your business generates (e.g., specific coffee cups or packaging). These signs are especially helpful if you have a self-busing restaurant where your customers sort their own waste.

Please email zerowaste@bouldercolorado.gov to obtain free laminated signs and/or bin stickers or for information on having custom signs created. There are also printable PDFs of stock signs available on the [Universal Zero Waste Ordinance](#) 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 and 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 loose and the liner is placed in the trash bin or reused until no longer effective.
- For cleaner compostables collection, consider using compostable bags (BPI certified compostable or paper bags) or using no liner and washing your containers regularly since plastic garbage bags cannot be put in your compost collection container.

Chapter 6: Employee or Tenant Training

This is 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 your work areas and how to properly sort your waste so everything ends up in the right bin.

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

While not required, you can set up your restaurant, café 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](#).

Take the Sorting Quiz

Each employee must take the sorting quiz at boulder.recycle.game and it is the responsibility of the owner to ensure the certificates of completion are kept on file.

Keep Records

It is important to keep records of employees trained and dates of the training. Conduct trainings on an annual basis, as well as 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 [Universal Zero Waste Ordinance](#) page and make sure that janitorial staff separates the three waste streams and places the waste in the 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 loose and the liner is placed in the trash bin or reused until no longer effective.

Chapter 7: Reporting Compliance

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

Note: All reporting requirements and deadlines have been suspended until further notice.

Who Needs to Report and Deadlines

- **By June 30, 2019 and annually thereafter:** All restaurants and grocery stores
- **By June 30, 2020 and annually thereafter:** All food-producing businesses
- **No sooner than June 30, 2021,** the City Manager may also require other businesses and property owners to annually report.

Businesses that do not report when required are assumed to be noncompliant. These businesses will then 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 need to complete a Zero Waste Reporting Form. Please note 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 and to report, visit the [Universal Zero Waste Ordinance](#) page.

Reporting compliance also 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 the requirements of the ordinance. 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

Applying for an exemption is done through the same [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 the 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

The City of Boulder wants to encourage compliance, and has created a number of resources to help you achieve success at complying with the Universal Zero Waste Ordinance.

We Are Here to Help

The City of Boulder 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](#).
- We have a [video for business owners](#) and a [video for property owners](#) walking you through an overview of steps to compliance with the ordinance.
- 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](#) on how to deal with the three waste stream system of compost, recycling and trash.

Check out the [Universal Zero Waste Ordinance](#) page for information, tips and local facilities to help you reuse, recycle and compost more.

Still Have Questions or Need Help? Contact Us!

Email zerowaste@bouldercolorado.gov or call [303-441-1931](tel:303-441-1931) to request assistance, or refer to the [City Manager’s Rules](#) for additional details about how to comply with the requirements.