

Contamination Charges and Removal of Diversion Discounts Protocol

Effective beginning in Rate Year 2026

Recology implements a system of notices and charges for Contamination designed to promote recycling and composting, ensure that each customer is subscribed to the correct service level, and cover the extra costs that Recology incurs to remove Contamination from the three collection streams. This system is designed in compliance with the City's [Mandatory Composting and Recycling Ordinance of 2009](#).

1. Background

Contamination refers to any material placed in the wrong collection container, whether it be non-compostable material, including plastics, in the compost stream or compostable items in the landfill stream, as defined in the [Refuse Rate Order Service Level Agreements Section 4: Core Collection Services](#). Contamination is particularly problematic in the composting collection because these items do not break down as part of the composting process at Recology's Blossom Valley Organics – North (BVON) facility. When contaminated materials are removed from the composting or recycling streams, the process removes additional compostable or recyclable material and increases landfill. Currently, 30% of the total organics tonnage collected by Recology Sunset Scavenger ("RSS") and Recology Golden Gate ("RGG") is non-compostable or of limited compostability. This percentage is high by industry standards. BVON generally requires 10% or less contamination in the organics feedstock delivered to its premises.

Recology is taking a number of steps to reduce contamination in its compost stream, including investing in onboard cameras in certain trucks, and installing industrial compost pre-processing equipment to remove contamination at its facilities, and educating the public on what goes where. Contamination fees are part of this solution and will incentivize customers to sort refuse properly. These fees will help shift the costs of contamination from the general public to the ratepayers generating the contamination.

2. Contamination Thresholds

Collection containers will be assessed visually by Recology staff for contamination of accepted materials outlined in the [Refuse Rate Order Service Level Agreements Section 4: Core Collection Services](#), and further detailed at www.SFRecycles.org. Recology staff and drivers will use their best judgement to assess the level of contamination and efforts to source separate. [Chapter 19 of the San Francisco Environmental Code](#) designates the Director of the Environment Department or their designee to set and maintain contamination thresholds based on market conditions and processing capabilities. If contaminants exceed the threshold(s) outlined below,

Contamination Charges and Removal of Diversion Discounts

the collection container(s) may be eligible for the protocol outlined to be assessed contamination charge(s).

<i>Collection stream</i>	<i>Threshold</i>
<i>Recycle</i>	10%
<i>Compost</i>	5%
<i>Trash</i>	25%

3. Contamination Identification

Container contamination will be identified by Recology through a variety of methods, including:

1. Recology refuse collection drivers and staff may flag the account within the Recology customer database following visual observations made during regular collection service. Contamination will be documented with onboard technology or camera monitoring technology.
2. The Recology Waste Zero team may identify contaminated containers while performing random inspections throughout the community.
3. City staff and residents may document or flag an account and notify Recology.

When contamination in excess of the threshold is identified by the driver or supervisor at the point of collection, it will be documented on the onboard systems and the ratepayer's cart will be tagged. The tag will inform the ratepayer that contamination has been identified above the allowed threshold, and that additional charges may be incurred. When contamination is identified by onboard cameras inside the collection vehicle, there will be a delay in notifying the ratepayer so that the footage can be reviewed before contact is made with the account holder. The Recology Waste Zero (WZ) team will then review accounts that have contamination notes and contact the customers to offer assistance in resolving the contamination. The Recology Waste Zero team will contact customers with multiple contamination notes to offer assistance and provide signage or brochures if needed.

Depending on the type and amount of contamination the driver may notify dispatch to have the container serviced by another route to prevent excessive contamination of the load (recycling or compost containers may be collected as trash).

4. Contamination Monitoring and Communication Process

There are two categories of accounts; accounts with monthly billing (large apartment or commercial ratepayers) and accounts with quarterly billing (small residential ratepayers).

Contamination Charges and Removal of Diversion Discounts

Recology Sunset Scavenger and Recology Golden Gate will provide warnings and charge contamination fees to ratepayers as follows based on the category of account:

A. Accounts With Monthly Billing: Six-Unit or Larger Residential Apartment and Commercial Ratepayers

Residential Apartments with six or more units and Commercial ratepayers are billed monthly and defined in [the Refuse Rate Order](#).

1) First instance: At the first instance of observed contamination exceeding the threshold outlined above, the driver may tag the trash, recycling, or compost container with a written warning that notifies the ratepayer that contamination was observed in the collection container and that fees may be assessed for future instances of contamination. In addition, Recology shall mail a letter to this customer at either their service or billing address. In some instances, when Recology deems necessary, the same information may be sent to both addresses in an attempt to contact a decisionmaker for the account. The first instance of observed contamination exceeding the threshold will expire after 67 days if no further contamination is documented.

2) Second instance: At the second instance of observed contamination exceeding the threshold, the driver may tag the trash, recycling, or compost container with a written notice that notifies the customer that contamination was observed in the collection container and that fees will now be assessed. This notice shall inform the customer that fees will be assessed for this instance of contamination and notify the customer that fees for future instances of contamination will increase. In addition, Recology shall mail a letter to this customer at either their service or billing address. In some instances, when Recology deems necessary, the same information may be sent to both addresses to contact a decision maker for the account. The first and second instances of observed contamination exceeding the threshold will expire after 90 days from the second notice if no further contamination is documented.

The contamination fee for the second instance of contamination shall be equal to the fee for collecting an identically-sized trash (grey) container because the contaminated container will need to be collected as trash if not already dumped. For instance, if contamination is observed in a 64-gallon organics container, the ratepayer will be charged for collection of a 64-gallon trash container at the “extra” service rate in addition to the charge for the 64-gallon organics container.

3) Third instance: At the third instance of observed contamination exceeding the threshold, the driver may tag the trash, recycling, or compost container, Recology will mail a written notice that notifies the customer that contamination was observed in the trash, recycling, or compost collection and that fees will be assessed. This notice shall inform the customer that fees will be assessed for this instance of contamination and that fees for future instances of contamination will increase. The notice shall specify the fees that will be assessed

Contamination Charges and Removal of Diversion Discounts

for future instances of contamination as described below. Before assessing the charges below, Recology will give the account 30 days from the date the letter was mailed to correct the problem and notify Recology. If the problem is not corrected within that period, the volumetric charge will be added to the bill until removed in accordance with the process outlined below. In addition, a Recology Waste Zero specialist will contact the ratepayer directly to inform the ratepayer about the steps needed to remove the fees. The first and subsequent instances of observed contamination exceeding the threshold will expire after 90 days from the third notice if no further contamination is documented.

The fee for contamination will be added to the customer's monthly bill equal to an additional 50% of their monthly base charge for the contaminated waste stream and volume. This charge will continue monthly until the customer successfully removes the contamination and contacts a Waste Zero Specialist to confirm compliance as outlined below in "Removing Contamination Charges from Accounts with Monthly Billing". If the customer has not successfully removed the contamination after two months or have not followed up with a Waste Zero specialist, contamination fees will be assessed as described below, under "Fourth and subsequent instances."

4) Fourth and subsequent instances: At the fourth instance of observed contamination exceeding the threshold, the driver may tag the trash, recycling, or compost container, and the customer will be provided by mail with a written notice that notifies them that contamination was observed and that fees will be assessed. This notice shall inform the customer of the fees that will be assessed for this instance of contamination. This notice shall also inform the customer that a self-assessment or an inspection of the container(s) that shows no contamination will result in the removal of the volumetric contamination charges described above as of the next billing cycle. This inspection may be scheduled by the customer not less than 60 days after the last instance of contamination is identified. In addition, Recology shall mail a letter to this customer with the same information and a Waste Zero specialist will contact the customer directly via phone or email to inform them about the steps needed to remove the fees. A Waste Zero specialist may provide outreach which may include providing signage and offering an in-person or virtual training to the account holder. The account holder may invite tenants to attend the training or provide the information to their tenants. Any subsequent instance of contamination after 30 days from this step shall result in a fee equal to 100% of the volumetric base charge added to the customer's monthly bill and may be escalated to a removal of the landfill diversion discount (RODD).

At the point the customer's diversion discount is removed they will be required to perform and pass a [self-assessment](#) or have Recology perform an inspection of the containers (at a cost to the customer) to confirm the contamination has been reduced below the threshold. The RODD will remain in effect until the customer passes the self-assessment or inspection as stated above. If no further instances of contamination occur within 6 months after the date of passing the inspection, then any subsequent instance of contaminated container at the location will be treated as if it were the first instance. If contamination is identified in the container within six

Contamination Charges and Removal of Diversion Discounts

months of the charge being removed, then the contamination charge or RODD will be reinstated.

Removing Contamination Charges from Accounts with Monthly Billing

The procedure for removing the recurring contamination charges and the reinstatement of the diversion discount, is as follows:

1. The customer may request and submit a [self-assessment form](#) with photos for the location in question to Recology (customerservice@Recology.com).
 - a. The self-assessment form may require account holders:
 - i. To ensure all containers contain only correctly sorted materials.
 - ii. To fill out the self-assessment form and upload photos of the contents of their receptacles when their Recology containers (compost, recycling, landfill) are at least half-full.
 - iii. To examine their Containers: Look inside the containers and empty bags to clearly show the contents and identify what is inside each container. Forms containing photos of full, unopened plastic bags may not be accepted.
 - iv. To understand Sorting Rules: Know what items are acceptable or not in each container.
 - v. To record their Findings: To use checkmarks to indicate 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' materials in the boxes provided.
 - vi. To estimate Percentages: Estimate and note down the percentage of both 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' materials in each container.
 - vii. To check Contamination Thresholds: Ensure their estimated percentages are within the acceptable limits to pass the contamination check.
 - b. Recology will review the form within ten business days and respond to the account scheduling a follow-up conversation about additional opportunities for improving source-separation or with a decision regarding removal of the charges based on the self-assessment. An account may submit a self-assessment form at any point after they have been notified of contamination in excess of the threshold.
2. Recology will confirm receipt and, if necessary, schedule a quality assurance inspection within thirty (30) days of receipt of the account's request. The results of the inspection with detail on how to better improve sorting will be sent to the account via email or phone call. Circumstances in which it may be necessary for a quality assurance inspection may include a history of off-and-on prior contamination, or lack of clarity in the submitted photos.
3. If the account passes the inspection, then the contamination-related recurring charge(s) will be removed beginning the subsequent billing cycle.
4. If the account fails the inspection, then the contamination-related recurring charge(s) will continue for another monthly billing cycle, at which time another quality assurance inspection may be requested. `

Contamination Charges and Removal of Diversion Discounts

5. In the case of the Contamination charge if the inspection shows improvement but not enough to meet the thresholds, the Contamination charge may be decreased (e.g., from 50% to 25% of the Trash rate).

B. Accounts with Quarterly Billing: 1-5 Unit Residential Building Contamination Monitoring and Communication Process

Residential accounts with 1-5 units are billed quarterly as defined in [the Refuse Rate Order](#).

1) First instance: At the first instance of observed contamination in excess of the threshold, the driver shall tag the trash, recycling, or compost container with a written warning that notifies the residential customer that contamination was observed in the collection container and that fees will be assessed for future instances of contamination. The first instance of observed contamination exceeding the threshold will initiate a 6-month period of contamination noticing and review for a customer. If additional instances of contamination exceeding the threshold are observed during this period, the 6-month timeframe will restart, until 6 months have passed without any observations of contamination exceeding the threshold.

2) Second and subsequent instances: At the second and any subsequent instance of contamination identified, the driver shall tag the trash, recycling, or compost container with a written notice that notifies the ratepayer that contamination in excess of the threshold was observed a subsequent time in the trash, recycling, or compost collection and that customer may be charged the fee for extra bag/cart for the applicable volume or for the cart to be serviced as trash.

Removing Contamination Charges from Accounts with Monthly Billing

Contamination charges can not be removed. If six months have passed since the most recent observed instance of contamination exceeding the threshold, the observation period will have expired and if a next instance of contamination is observed after that point it will be treated as an initial instance and noticed but not charged a fee.