

Recycling at Condos & Apartments...Sometimes

When asked why he didn't recycle, Domingo De Souza, resident of a large New England apartment complex responded, "I would if it was here, I try, but it isn't. The only place to recycle is across town at the public works department, and I usually can't make time to go, or forget, and end up with bags of bottles and cans just sitting in my kitchen. Then I get annoyed with them there and just throw them in the dumpster. I want to recycle, it is just hard, ya know?"

De Souza's response is common among many people who live in apartment or condominium complexes around the country and reflects a general trend among average Americans when it comes to recycling: If it is convenient they will participate, but if it is not readily available the priority to recycle drops to the bottom of very long "to-do" lists.

According to a recent study, only fifty percent of apartment communities offer recycling for residents despite the fact that sixty-four percent of renters say they would choose a community that offers recycling and other eco-friendly amenities over a non-green community.

Yet many of the communities that fall into the fifty percent that do recycle don't do enough to make it easy and practical for most of the residents. One member of a New Jersey condominium community noted that even though recycling was available to residents, the recycling bins were placed in low-traffic areas. "They are located at the far corners of the complex where only one or two buildings have reasonable access," he said, "if you live anywhere else and want to recycle, you have to drive two miles across the complex to get there. Most of people's plastic and aluminum end up in the dumpsters next to their buildings. It's too bad."

This begs the question, why don't apartment and condominium communities make it easier for their residents to recycle?

The manager at De Souza's apartment complex indicated that recycling is an individual responsibility: "The town offers a drop-off location where residents may dispose of their recycling should they so choose, but that is all we offer here." The manager refused to comment further on why the complex didn't start a program, however common reasons include lack of space, lack of interest, or fear of compromising community aesthetics.

So what are the options? While some towns offer recycling pickup in conjunction with trash pickup, they often don't include complexes on their truck routes. Large waste management companies like Allied Waste, can be employed to pick up recycling for a price, but most associations or communities will not pay for a sufficient number of recycling containers.

The ideal solution would be an independent or town run flexible pickup service that would utilize a town's existing recycling centers to dispose of the recyclable goods, but either way local communities have to add a layer to shrinking budgets to do so. If enough

residents speak up, that can be accomplished. In apartment and condo complexes, even a single voice can make a difference in convincing government officials (like the Director of Recycling in my community) to enforce existing regulations and mandate that multi-unit communities have plenty of convenient recycling containers for their residents. Business plans designed to expand and enhance recycling programs can be submitted to government officials and complex managers for their consideration and utilization.