



Guidance for Businesses Contracting for Trash, Recycling, & Food Waste Services

This document provides guidelines to businesses and institutions for establishing or modifying contracts for trash, recyclables, and/or organics hauling. The guidance is organized into four topic areas:

- Knowing Your Waste
- Creating and Adjusting Contracts
- Complying with Waste Disposal Bans and Other Regulations
- Communicating Effectively





Know Your Waste

Before contracting a hauler, take a look at your waste so you know what materials your business discards. Many of the materials may be recyclable, compostable, or otherwise diverted from the waste stream, such as cardboard, paper, plastic bottles, or food scraps (commonly referred to as “organics”).

- Look into barrels and dumpsters to estimate the type and volume of material your business is discarding.
- Conduct a waste assessment to collect more detailed data. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provides instructions for conducting a [waste assessment](#) to determine the amount and types of waste your facility generates. You can conduct such an assessment by [examining records](#), doing a [walk-through of the facility](#), or completing a [waste sort](#).
- The [Connecticut Food Waste Estimation Guidance](#) can be a useful tool for estimating your food waste generation.
- Ask your hauler for regular detailed reports for your waste, recycling, and organics. This will help you identify trends and establish a baseline for any diversion programs.



Creating and Adjusting Contracts

When creating, modifying, and renewing contracts, ensure that your contract provides the services that match your business needs. If you are experiencing high service costs, consider soliciting quotes from several haulers to compare charges and service options. The information below includes some things to discuss when contracting for service with a waste hauler.

Creating Contracts:

Service Costs

- Hauling invoices can appear complicated because they **include several fees**. It is important to understand how they are calculated and if they fluctuate. For example, recycling charges or rebates are tied to recycling markets and may change monthly. Contamination charges may also increase your monthly bill.
- Review what charges, such as capital investment(s), will be included in **monthly service costs** and if there are any costs that will be required **upfront**.
- Understand if you will be charged **hauling and tonnage fees** or a **flat rate pickup charge**. Additionally, confirm if there will be any increases during the contract period on disposal or hauling costs.
- Clarify the **cost for extra surcharges**, such as container rental, fuel/environmental, container delivery/removal, extra pickups, overflowing containers, waste ban contamination, contamination of recycling or organics streams, etc.

Pickup Schedule and Frequency

- **Communicate any pickup scheduling restrictions** to your hauler, such as physical barriers or a noise ordinance that restricts the hauler's collection schedule.
- **Evaluate cost differential** between scheduled and on-call services.
- Ensure you have flexibility to increase or decrease services as needed.
- Understand how **missed pickups will be rescheduled** and communicated to you (e.g. car blocking container, holiday schedules, and inclement weather).
- Ask how materials will be managed for **special events** or other instances requiring additional service. Confirm details such as whether extra bins will be provided or extra pickups scheduled.

Container Sizes and Types

- Haulers may provide compactors, dumpsters, or carts for your business.
- "Right size" your **collection containers** and pickup frequency to optimize diversion, service efficiency, and cost effectiveness. Check containers just before they are emptied to **assess capacity needs**. Reviewing right before servicing will help you understand if there is extra room in the container, if your service levels are just right, or if the container is regularly overflowing.
- Once you have implemented a recycling, organics, or other diversion program, remember to **evaluate your trash collection needs**, as you will likely be able to reduce service frequency or container size as material is diverted from the trash.
- Clarify who is responsible for cleaning and maintaining collection containers (you or your hauler). Work with your hauler to identify any access or safety issues with container placement (e.g. icy roads in the winter, overhead wires, traffic).



Handling Contamination and Rejected Load

- Placing material in the wrong containers can **cause contamination issues**. For instance, plastic bags cannot be placed in single stream or dual stream recycling collections at your home or business. However, they may be collected separately and recycled at a retailer or by working with a recycler for a special pickup.
- Check with your hauler to learn about **specific contamination thresholds** (in weight or volume), as these may vary.
- **Photos from your hauler** can be a helpful tool for identifying contaminants and improving the quality of your collected material.
- A best practice is to **establish a process for handling contaminated loads**. This may include the driver notifying the appropriate contact at the business about an issue and providing the opportunity to correct issues before material is hauled away as trash.
- Understand what your hauler charges for a **rejected load**.
- Make sure your hauler knows the best person at your business to reach out to if there are contamination issues. Similarly, you should have current contact information for your hauler.

Hauler Reporting

- **Reports provide data** on the volume or weight of materials that your hauler collects.
- Ask how frequently you will receive reports and how the hauler will provide information about end sites where your material is delivered.
- **Knowing the end sites** for your materials may help guide the management of your waste program. For example, if you use compostableware and your food scraps are sent to an anaerobic digester then your compostableware is likely being sorted out as contamination. If you are interested in learning about your disposal and recycling facilities, ask your hauler to schedule a tour.
- Reports may include **recommendations for improving your program and efficiency**. For example, your hauler may flag common contaminants. Additionally, reports can reveal if your bin sizing and collection rates exceed service needs.

Invoicing

- **Request a sample invoice** to ensure you understand it before entering into a service contract.
- If any charges are unclear, **ask your hauler** about them.
- **Request unbundled pricing** (i.e., separate prices for each stream) or, if pricing is bundled, request a breakdown in order to compare cost incentives for diversion.





Contract Terms

- Contracts are typically for **three-year terms** but you should discuss options with your hauler.
- Many contracts **automatically renew** for the full term. Be aware of your renewal date and set a reminder to check in with your hauler at least 90 days in advance of the contract end date. You may also have the option to remove boilerplate contract language for auto-renewal, or establish different contract terms.
- Check to see if there is a **cancellation provision** that protects you from unsatisfactory performance.
- **Ensure that your contract allows you to hire outside services** if your hauler does not provide them or the costs are too high, such as organics pick-up.

Adjusting Existing Contracts:

Haulers typically allow adjustments to service levels mid contract. Adjustments can include diverting new materials, changing sizes of containers, and changing pickup schedules.

Sub-Contracting:

If you request a service that your hauler doesn't provide, they may subcontract it, or ask you to seek the service on your own. This is particularly relevant for organics, electronics, and hazardous waste.

- **The advantage of sub-contracting** is you only have one waste hauling contract to manage. However, it is important that your hauler communicates effectively with the subcontractor about any service concerns.
- If your hauler has a bulk rate for services with the subcontractor, **working through your primary hauler may save money.**
- In other cases, subcontracting may be costlier but provides ease for you as the customer by streamlining contracts.

If a service is subcontracted, **communication will likely be between you and the primary hauler**, rather than directly with the subcontractor. See communication section below for expectations.



Complying with Waste Disposal Bans and Other Regulations

Some states ban materials, such as food waste, cardboard, fluorescent bulbs, and yard waste from disposal. Visit the Wasted Food Solutions website [page for your state](#) to identify if you are subject to a food waste disposal ban. Your municipality or state agency may be able to provide information about additional bylaws/ordinances or regulations requiring businesses to recycle.

Your business, waste hauler (including subcontractors and/or brokers), and disposal sites are all responsible for properly handling waste according to local, state, and federal regulations. It is important to be aware of the waste bans and regulations, and properly separate materials to comply with them.

Communicating Effectively

Clear communication to staff and patrons about where materials go and how they are processed helps increase participation in materials diversion programs and decrease contamination.

Regular communication with a waste hauler leads to more effective waste management services and higher diversion rates of recyclable and organic materials. Problems in a waste management program can be identified by staff, drivers, and/or management teams. Therefore, building a relationship and ensuring regular communication between your business and your hauler is key. When expectations and service needs are agreed upon, the trash, recycling, and organics can be handled properly and efficiently.

The following strategies can help support effective waste program.



Signage, Containers, and Training

- **Ask your hauler** what materials are accepted in the trash, recycling, and organics streams.
- **Post signs** for trash, recycling, and organics collection containers that **reflect the waste materials at your facility**. Request that your hauler post signs on your external containers indicating this information. CET can provide support by offering templates for signage that can be used inside your facility.
- **Clearly designate containers** by shape, color, and lid opening configuration to optimize diversion.
- Provide regular **staff training**.
 - Consider establishing a team in your organization to check bins and containers, and to train new staff on recycling and sorting initiatives.
 - Work with staff when contamination arises to make sure that materials are sorted correctly.

Reduce Contamination

- Consider **locking collection container doors** to limit unauthorized access.
- **Regularly check for contamination** and re-train staff as needed.
- Respond to feedback from your hauler quickly to **prevent rejected loads**.

Consider Resource Management (RM) Contracting

- RM Contracting is a performance based contracting approach designed to **reduce waste and increase diversion** through dedicated customer service, detailed reporting, and program analysis. Visit the US EPA's [Resource Management webpage](#) for additional information.

Request Assistance from CET

- If your business would like **help improving your recycling program**, use [CET](#) as a resource.
- CET can work with businesses and haulers to implement a program, including training, signage, and explanation of the waste bans.
- To request assistance, call CET's Wasted Food Solutions hotline at **888-813-8552** or email wastedfood@cetonline.org.





CET helps people and businesses save energy and reduce waste. CET acts as a catalyst to accelerate the development of a vibrant marketplace to divert wasted food from the commercial and institutional sectors. We have been a leader in the wasted food reduction and diversion movement for more than 20 years, implementing some of the first wasted food composting programs in the country, and contributing to effective public policy.

We believe that better managing wasted food is critical in order to address climate change, feed more hungry people, and grow our economy. If you are a city, state or federal agency, industry group or foundation, and want to tackle the issue of wasted food, please contact us!

**If you have any questions or feedback, please contact CET at
888-813-8552 or email wastedfood@cetonline.org.**

CET developed this original document under contract to MassDEP as part of the RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts program. This was developed in collaboration with health officials, food rescue organizations, food banks, and organizations with established food donation programs. Updates to the document were made possible by a Sustainable Materials Management grant from EPA Region 5.