



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on January 30, 2015

Seattle's Garbage Police Ticketing Those Who Throw Away Food

Seattle residents, beware: The garbage police are on the prowl. If you put too much food — as defined by the Seattle City Council — into your trash, you will be publicly shamed. And if you keep doing it, you will be fined.

Last September, the city council, in a move the [Seattle Times](#) said did not require a public hearing, made formerly voluntary composting and recycling guidelines mandatory for all Seattle residents. As of January 1, anyone caught with a trash can containing more than 10 percent food or recyclables gets a big red tag stuck on his can and, beginning in July, an extra dollar added to his garbage bill.



And just who is going to enforce this onerous mandate? According to the *Times*:

Under the new rules, [garbage] collectors can take a cursory look each time they dump trash into a garbage truck.

If they see compostable items make up 10 percent or more of the trash, they'll enter the violation into a computer system their trucks already carry, and will leave a ticket on the garbage bin that says to expect a \$1 fine on the next garbage bill.

One needn't be Sherlock Holmes to detect something amiss here. If the garbage man is really only allowed a "cursory look" into the can, how can he possibly determine if its contents meet the 10-percent threshold? As Hot Air's [Mary Katharine Ham](#) observed, "he's either painstakingly rifling through trash cans or ignoring the 10-percent rule and profligately offering tags and fines." Rodney Watkins, a driver for waste contractor Recology CleanScapes, told [NPR](#), "Right now, I'm tagging probably every fifth can." (Seattle Public Utilities solid-waste director Tim Croll denies that the mandate is about raising revenue.)

Landlords, too, are being drafted into the garbage police. The 10-percent rule applies to apartment buildings as well as single-family residences, but the fine for apartment owners is \$50. (The council was benevolent enough to allot them two warning tags before imposing the fine.) Although tenants don't officially have to abide by the composting rule, it stands to reason that their landlords aren't going to sit idly by and eat \$50 fines week after week. Tenants will most likely be harangued about composting by their landlords and threatened with higher rents if they don't comply.

Why is Seattle so intent on forcing residents to compost and recycle?

First, the city has a goal of recycling 60 percent of its waste by the end of this year, but Seattleites haven't quite gotten with the program. Despite the city's campaigning for recycling, they're only



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recycling 56 percent of their waste and don't seem to be able to improve on that without compulsion. In fact, noted [Oregon Public Broadcasting](#), "recycling in residential homes actually dipped 0.3 percent from 2012 to 2013."

Second, food waste left out in the open "produces methane, one of the most harmful greenhouses [sic] gases, as it rots," wrote the [Washington Post](#). "The second largest component of landfills in the United States is organic waste, and landfills are the single largest source of methane gas." And since the Left Coast is nothing if not in thrall to the radical environmentalist agenda — never mind the fact that there has been [no "global warming" for at least 18 years](#) — Seattle simply cannot allow this "dangerous" gas to enter the atmosphere. It's hoping instead to produce about 38,000 tons of compost annually.

According to NPR, "Seattle Public Utilities estimates that every family in the city throws away some 400 pounds of food each year. The city gives households bins to fill with their food and yard waste. But residents don't have to compost it themselves: They can just leave the bins curbside and have the city pick it up for a fee."

Some people like the idea of forced composting, among them trash collector Watkins, who told NPR as he lifted the lid on a garbage can, "You can see all the oranges and coffee grounds. All that makes great compost. You can put that in your compost bin and buy it back next year in a bag and put it in your garden." That is, Seattleites can first pay the city to compost their food waste — or cough up a fine if they don't compost — and then pay again to get it back, assuming they have a use for it. Who could object?

Colin Hearn, a 28-year-old Seattle resident who works at a marijuana dispensary, told [Al Jazeera America](#), "Personally, I'm a fan of composting. I think it's kind of hypocritical not to compost. But in terms of regulating it, I'm not sure about that."

"I guess it would be foolish not to try it," he added. "But I don't like the idea of punishing someone for not composting."

Marty Bisch, a 59-year-old retired police officer and lifelong Seattle resident, told Al Jazeera America that he, too, was a little leery of the city's approach, preferring to "reward" composters rather than "fine" non-composters. Taxpayers, of course, would have to foot the bill for such rewards.

Others have raised concerns about the compost-or-pay scheme's burden on taxpayers.

"This program is not free; it costs money and nobody is looking at the real cost of this [program]," Todd Myers, environment director for the conservative Washington Policy Center, told Seattle TV station [KCPQ](#).

City officials hope that by tagging but not fining Seattleites for the first six months of the year, people will change their ways before July 1. They also appear to be counting on the highly visible tags to shame non-composters into compliance. The combination just might help the city hit its recycling target.

Still, not everyone is convinced that the mandate, even if successful, is worth it.

"There are a lot of ways to spend this money to actually do good for the planet.... Seattle is very good at doing things that feel good, but very bad at doing things that do good for the planet," said Myers.

Or as Hot Air's Ham put it, "They say compost and recycling. What they mean is compulsion and revenue."

Other cities, such as San Francisco, have imposed similar laws, but none has gone as far as Seattle.



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However, people living outside these left-wing enclaves shouldn't get too comfortable: Most states and many local jurisdictions have recycling laws of one kind or another, just waiting to be extended in ever more intrusive ways.

"When I was at *Seattle Weekly* in the early '00s, I wrote a column raising alarm about the extent to which the city would turn into garbage 'Nazis' when it came to policing recycling," penned [Knute Berger](#) of Crosscut.com. "I was reassured that the city wouldn't bother digging into the garbage of individuals — they were after bigger fish, namely commercial and industrial clients."

Today the city is indeed digging into individuals' garbage. Businesses, meanwhile, "aren't subject to any composting requirements," reported the *Times*.

Yes, folks, "garbage Nazism" can happen here — wherever "here" happens to be in the Land of the Formerly Free.



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