



Food Scrap Recycling at Multi-Family Properties

Case Study: Rock Creek Village



Background

Rock Creek Village is a 224-unit garden style condominium complex located in Silver Spring, Maryland. Originally built in 1940 to house soldiers, Rock Creek Village converted the property to apartments and then condominiums in the 1980s. In 2016, Rock Creek Village Condominium was recognized by Montgomery County for their outstanding efforts in recycling as they switched from a curbside recycling and trash collection system to a more efficient centralized collection system.

Rock Creek Village was also recognized by Montgomery County in 2017 for their efforts to further reduce the amount of waste generated at their property with the implementation of a pilot food scrap recycling program. Rock Creek Village residents contacted their Homeowner Association (HOA) staff about setting up a food scrap recycling collection and composting program.

Through efforts led by the residents, Rock Creek Village obtained a 14-gallon food scrap recycling collection container and contracted collection service with Veteran Compost to collect food scraps for a three-month pilot program in 2016. Based on the initial success and popularity of this program, the food scrap recycling program was extended in 2017 and added to the Rock Creek Village annual budget.



Process

Rock Creek Village has six trash and recycling areas located throughout the 224-unit property of 31 buildings. The largest trash and recycling collection area in proximity to the management office is where the food scrap recycling collection container is kept for resident use. The other five collection areas direct residents via signage to this designated collection area for recycling their food scraps.



One of six trash and recycling areas at Rock Creek Village

Though the food scrap recycling program was initiated by Rock Creek Village residents, they are no longer involved in management of the program. Maintenance staff routinely monitor food scraps in the central collection container, ensuring they are free of contamination, and that containers are not overflowing. Veteran Compost picks up the food scraps weekly, replaces the food scrap recycling collection container with a clean container, and transports food scraps to their food scrap recycling processing facility. Within the first year of the program, Veteran Compost presented Rock Creek Village with a 12-pound bag of compost farmed from it's collected material. With no community garden, Rock Creek Village donated the compost to Lafayette Elementary School in Washington, D.C.

Education

Staff at Rock Creek Village took a more hands-on approach to educating themselves on food scrap recycling. On-site manager, Edna Kweti, started collecting food scraps in her own kitchen at home. She became familiar with food scrap recycling collection and educated other staff at Rock Creek Village on the process.



On-site Manager at Rock Creek Village, Edna Kweti



Food scraps placed in the food scrap recycling container by residents

To educate residents on their food scrap recycling program, Rock Creek Village sends email notices, posts reminders throughout the property, and labels collection containers with the types of acceptable materials. New residents are informed of the program at each new resident orientation session. This information is also included in their resident manual and shared in the monthly community email blast updates.

Results

Rock Creek Village recycled 3,858 pounds of food scraps in 2017. Since the pilot program began in 2016, nearly 20 percent of residents are participating the food scrap recycling program. Participation varies depending on the season and weather due to the limited placement of food scrap collection containers. Participation is projected to increase with placement of additional containers in all collection areas and with increased awareness of food scrap recycling.

Benefits

The benefit of food scrap recycling at Rock Creek Village is the reduction in the number of trash containers and reduced frequency of trash collection. In addition, maintenance staff have observed a reduction in the frequency of overflowing trash containers throughout the property. This not only reduces trash disposal costs, but it keeps collection areas clean for ease of access for both residents and staff.

Rock Creek Village Management noticed that having a food scrap recycling program benefits the community as a whole. This undertaking by the community did not go unnoticed by the new neighbors, Sunrise Senior Living - Chevy Chase, who sponsored a “Meet & Shred” event, inviting the Rock Creek Communities to bring their boxes of paper to shred, with hopes that the community will find more ways to expand their recycling outreach options.

Opportunities & Lessons Learned

During the first weeks of implementing the food scrap recycling program, the central food scrap recycling collection container disappeared. In response, Rock Creek Village increased education and visibility of its program. This involved email blasts to residents and revising/redesigning food scrap recycling signage in the collection areas.



Posters raise awareness on food scrap recycling in the Rock Creek Village community

Another challenge for Rock Creek Village is limited space for storing central collection containers within its collection areas. This makes it difficult to add a food scrap recycling collection container and provide visibility for the appropriate signage. Rock Creek Village overcame this challenge through strategic placement of the food scrap recycling containers and converting existing trash containers to food scrap recycling containers.

Next Steps

The next step for Rock Creek Village is to expand the capacity of its program. Based on the success of the initial pilot program, Rock Creek Village is looking to increase the size of the food scrap recycling collection container or, more importantly, the number of containers on its property. Placing a food scrap recycling collection container in each collection area will create the convenience necessary for greater participation by residents in the food scrap recycling program. This step requires communication with their food scrap recycling collector, as does increasing the frequency of food scrap collection service.



Recommendations

For those multi-family properties considering a food scrap recycling program, Rock Creek Village suggests talking to residents. Residents are key to the success of a food scrap recycling program. If food scrap recycling is something residents at your property are passionate about, or even just interested in, it is worth pursuing. Their support is useful in developing the program and establishing roles and responsibilities for both staff and residents.

Rock Creek Village also suggests speaking to a food scrap recycling collection company and becoming familiar with the services they provide, and the process involved in food scrap recycling. It is also helpful to discuss the option of starting your program small, such as in a main office on the property. Asking these questions before starting your food scrap recycling program will ensure success.

**For more information visit
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/recycling or call 3-1-1 or 240-777-0311**



**Montgomery County, Maryland • Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Solid Waste Services • Waste Reduction and Recycling Section**

This information is available in an alternative format by calling 240-777-6446.