



Consumer Guide

Residential and Commercial Garbage and Recycling

W A S H I N G T O N



UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

Garbage and Recycling

This guide contains answers to the most frequently asked questions from customers of privately owned garbage and recycling companies, which are regulated by the Utilities and Transportation Commission.

Please note: If your garbage and recycling services are provided by city employees or by a company under contract with a city or county, this guide does not apply. Instead, you should contact your city or county's solid waste department for assistance.

Here's some quick history. In Washington, solid waste and recycling collection has long been a regulated "monopoly" industry. Before 1961, this industry could choose to serve only the most lucrative markets, leaving some unincorporated counties without solid waste collection services, or paying much higher charges than in other markets.



The state Legislature stepped in and created exclusive solid waste territories so that all customers would receive basic solid waste services. There were two reasons for this decision: to create universal garbage service for all customers; and to enhance safety by limiting the number of garbage trucks driving in residential areas and on the roads.

The commission's role is to regulate service and rates for privately-owned garbage and recycling companies.

For a list of regulated companies in Washington, please visit www.utc.wa.gov/solidwaste.

Questions and Answers About Your Services

Can a solid waste company refuse to provide me service?

Yes. A solid waste company may refuse to provide service for any of the following reasons:

- When you do not meet state, county or municipal laws concerning solid waste services, for example, not using a proper solid waste container.
- When conditions at your site are deemed by the company to be

hazardous or impractical. This can include everything from insufficient truck access, to bad roads and weather, to dangerous animals, to a garbage can that exceeds the allowable weight.

- When your payment is overdue with the company for the same type of service at the same or a different address.
- When someone else currently living with you has an overdue bill with the company; has not made satisfactory arrangements for payment of the overdue bill; and the company has objective evidence that you are helping the prior customer to avoid payment.
- If you deceptively obtained service.

A company cannot refuse service if the people who lived there before you left with an unpaid bill.

Can the company skip a pickup due to poor weather conditions?

Yes, but you can set the missed garbage out for the next regularly scheduled pick up at no extra cost.

Does the company have the right to discontinue my service if I don't pay my bill on time?

Yes. You may lose service if you fail to pay your bill or make payment arrangements, or if you have violated the rules or service agreements agreed upon at the time you began service.

Will I receive notice before discontinuance of my garbage service?

Yes. The company must mail a written notice to your address before it can discontinue garbage or recycling pickup. The company must wait eight business days following the mailing before stopping service if the notice was mailed from within Washington, 11 business days if mailed from outside Washington. The company also must make an attempt to contact you no later than 24 hours before the stoppage date on the written notice. The company must try either by two phone calls, or a notice on your container or door. If you do not feel you were properly notified, ask to speak with a supervisor at the company. If you are still not satisfied, call the commission's Consumer Protection Help Line toll-free at 1-888-333-WUTC (9882).

How do I make a complaint against my garbage company?

Contact the company first and attempt to resolve the complaint. If the company representative is unable to resolve your dispute, ask to speak with a supervisor. If, after speaking with the supervisor, you are still dissatisfied; call the commission.

You may file a complaint by calling the commission's toll-free Consumer Help Line at 1-888-333-WUTC (9882) or consumer@utc.wa.gov. Consumer Protection staff will contact the company on your behalf and work with both you and the company to attempt to resolve your dispute.



Do I have to pay a deposit for solid waste collection service?

Homeowners and customers with good credit records will not have to pay a deposit. Customers without a satisfactory credit rating might be required to pay a deposit before service begins. The following examples are conditions that may require a deposit:

- You owe an unpaid, overdue balance to another garbage collection company.
- You received two or more delinquent notices from your prior company in the previous twelve months.
- Another occupant at your address has an overdue bill owed to the company.
- You lost garbage service within the last 12 months for failure to pay.

How much can I expect the deposit to be?

The amount of deposit depends on the type of service you have and whether the company bills monthly, every other month, or quarterly. Example: You sign up for one-can weekly service. If the company's billed monthly rate for service is \$10, your deposit will be \$20.

The deposit schedule is:

- If the company bills monthly, your deposit is two months estimated service cost.
- If the company bills every other month, your deposit is three months of estimated service cost.
- If the company bills quarterly, your deposit is four months of estimated service cost.

When will I get my deposit back?

If you pay on time for 12 consecutive months, you will receive a full refund, either by check or by applying the deposit to your account balance plus interest. Prompt payment means you cannot have received more than two past-due notices in the previous 12 months.

What if I am unable to pay a deposit?

Your company must make payment arrangements with you for the deposit. The company must allow the option of paying one-half of the deposit prior to receiving service, and paying the remaining balance of your deposit in two equal payments over a two month period.

Rates

How can I learn more about the rates my company charges?

Commission-approved rates are kept in a company's commission-approved plan. The plan is called a "tariff."

This plan covers rates, services, terms and conditions of service.

Companies' tariffs are available on the commission's website, www.utc.wa.gov. You also can contact your company and they will send you a copy of their tariff upon request. You can also view a company's tariff at their office.

How is my garbage rate determined?

Many factors contribute to the cost of garbage services, including: disposal fees; equipment costs; drivers' wages; taxes; compliance with local regulations; and administrative expenses. If any of these costs change, your company must seek approval from the commission to change rates and you will receive a notice of the company's intent to increase rates. You will be asked to comment on the proposed increase. This is your chance to be involved in the commission's decision-making process.

How can I get more information about a pending rate increase?

Call the commission toll-free at 1-888-333-WUTC (9882) for information about participating in the commission's rate-setting process and information about a specific rate case. Commission staff can place you on a mailing list that will automatically notify you of a public meeting regarding the proposed increase.

How does the commission decide whether to approve a rate change?

Commission staff sets all rates based on four basic questions. Is the rate fair, just, reasonable and sufficient? As the commission considers a



company request for a rate change, it applies the four questions with solid information, including an audit of the company's expenses and consideration of all public comments about the proposed rate increase. Following this review, staff makes a recommendation to the three-member commission at a public meeting at which customers may also speak about the proposal. The commission

may approve changes proposed by the company, grant lower or higher rates than requested, or postpone the rate increase for further investigation.

What information should be on my bill?

All solid waste bills must show:

- The billing period;
- The mailing date, due date and when the bill becomes delinquent;
- The company name, address and telephone number;
- The amount and percentage of each tax or fee;
- Each service listed as a separate line item;
- The total amount due; and
- A late payment fee, if applicable.

Can the company assess a late payment charge?

Yes, if the company has a late payment charge in its tariff.

How can I lower my garbage bill?

Contact your company to determine what service level options are available. By recycling, you may be able to reduce your garbage amount and move to a smaller container. To find out more about recycling options, contact your company or you may call the Washington State Department of Ecology at 1-800-RECYCLE (1-800-732-9253).

How can I get rid of household hazardous waste?

Contact your county for assistance. Many times they will accept solvents, unused paint, concrete and acids at different disposal sites. Do not put hazardous waste in with your regular garbage. There are special handling standards for the collection and disposal of these materials in federal, state and local rules.

Contact the Commission

Consumer Help Line

1-888-333-WUTC (9882) toll free
consumer@utc.wa.gov

General Information

(360) 664-1160
info@utc.wa.gov

www.utc.wa.gov

1300 S. Evergreen Park Drive SW
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To request this document in alternative formats to accommodate persons with disabilities, please call (360) 664-1132 or TTY 1-800-416-5989.

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