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## **Companies expand ‘green’ office options beyond regular recycling**

Composting goes corporate

Denver Business Journal - by [Cathy Proctor](#)

With recycling of glass, plastic and paper now the norm in greening up business practices, cutting-edge companies are implementing composting programs for their employees.

In Denver, the 400-employee Gates Corp. has removed trash bins from employee cubicles — leaving only a recycling bin under the desk, and big trash and composting bins in common areas. In April, the 430-room Westin Hotel in the Tabor Center, which also has 25,200 square feet of meeting space, launched a recycling and composting program for hotel guests and employees.

“I would have started this earlier if I knew it was this easy,” said Chuck Schuringa, director of operations at the Westin Tabor Center.

The moves are designed to divert mountains of trash from local landfills. Food scraps, tissues and compostable containers made with cardboard or corn-based resins now end up a rich, black material that’s spread across acres of landscape along the Front Range.

“We have a 90 percent diversion rate currently,” said Lisa Rapp, the property manager with Jones Realty Inc. who manages the 300,000-square-foot, 10-story Gates building at 1551 Wewatta St. in Lower Downtown.

“Our goal is 95 percent.”

“It breaks your heart to be throwing things away,” said Andrew Porte, executive sous chef at the Westin, who handles operations of the hotel’s food division. “And what is away? It’s still here and it’s still wasting.”

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines “trash” as everyday items such as product packaging, grass clippings, furniture, clothing, bottles, food scraps, newspapers, appliances, paint and batteries. In 2007, residents, businesses and institutions in the United States produced more than 254 million tons of trash, about 4.6 pounds per person per day, according to the agency.

About one-third of the waste is recovered, recycled or composted, with 12 percent burned in combustion facilities and the remaining 54 percent dumped in landfills, according to the EPA.

Recycling, which includes composting, has grown steadily through the years. In 2007, recycling diverted 85 million tons of trash away from landfills, up from 15 million tons in 1980, the agency says.

But there's room for growth in the composting industry.

Yard waste and food scraps account for 23 percent of the nation's waste stream. But while 57 percent of grass and tree clippings were recovered and composted in 2000, the latest year for which figures are available, a mere 2 percent of the nation's food scraps were composted.

"The key is having a good composting partner," Schuringa said.

The hotel decided to pursue recycling and composting in early 2008, when Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper met with businesses and issued a challenge to make the city's August 2008 Democratic National Convention the "greenest" convention ever.

"We wanted to shine," Porte said. "I can't think of a reason not to do it. It adds more to the community and it's more socially responsible."

Both the Gates building and the Westin use Alpine Waste & Recycling Co. in Commerce City as their trash hauler. The company picks up compost bins on the loading docks three times a week and takes them to a Platteville facility owned by A1 Organics, a commercial composting company based in Eaton, in northeast Colorado.

"The customers wanted it," Brent Hildebrand, vice president of Alpine's recycling division, of hauling compost materials.

Alpine started hauling materials to A1's compost facility two years ago. It increased pick-ups to twice weekly in October due to the increase in materials. Alpine's compost customers also include Whole Foods and restaurants.

"About 70 percent of the waste stream is organic, and our mission has always been to divert as much as we can from landfilling and disposal," said Bob Yost, vice president of new business development for A1 Organics.

The company was started in 1974 when founder Duane Wilson needed to do something with the manure from his family's sheep-feeding operation in Eaton. The company now has 38 employees and handles up to 500,000 cubic yards of waste a year, with the capacity to handle two or three times that amount, Yost said.

After breaking down the waste using the natural processes of heat and time, A1 sells its compost to landscape companies and manufacturers, which use it as an ingredient in their branded, bagged compost found in yard and garden stores, he said.