

Frequently Asked Questions

How schools can follow Organics Management Laws

Q: What are the Organics Management Laws and how will they impact my school or school district?

A: Washington State passed a series of Organics Management Laws to help residents and businesses divert food and yard waste from landfills to reduce methane emissions and slow climate change. These laws require schools, businesses, residents, and others to manage their organic materials in environmentally preferred ways rather than sending them to landfills. There are two parts of the Organics Management Laws that impact how schools in certain geographic areas are required to manage their organic waste. These areas are identified as:

1. Business Organics Management Areas (BOMAs)

Schools located in a BOMA that generate more than 96 gallons of organic materials (including food waste) per week must comply with the BOMA requirements.

2. Organics Recycling Collection Areas (ORCAs)

By April 1, 2030, all schools in an ORCA that generate more than 50 gallons of organic materials (including food waste) per week must have organics collection.

Q: How do I know if my school is in a BOMA?

A: Check Ecology's online Business Organics Management Areas (BOMA) interactive map to see which areas are affected by the law's requirements. This map identifies the impacted areas for the recent calendar year and is updated every July 1 to show changes, if any. For more information on how to use the BOMA map, watch Ecology's video tutorial. If a site in your Local Education Agency (LEA) is shaded blue on the map, then you may be subject to the requirements of the law. Each site address is considered separate when assessing the 96-gallon limit. Each site or location should be checked on the BOMA map, and the amount of organics waste should be assessed individually.

Q: How do I know if my school is in an ORCA?

A: Check Ecology's online [Organics Recycling Collection Areas \(ORCA\) interactive map](#) to see which areas are affected by the law's requirements starting in April 2030. This map identifies the impacted areas for the recent calendar year and is updated every November to show changes, if any. For more information on how to use the ORCA map, [watch Ecology's video tutorial](#). If a site in your Local Education Agency (LEA) is shaded dark blue on the map, then you may be subject to the requirements of the law. Each site address is considered separate when assessing the 50-gallon limit. Each site or location should be checked on the ORCA map, and the amount of organics waste should be assessed individually.

Q: My school or school district is in a BOMA and/or ORCA; is it required to comply with this law?

A:

School in a BOMA: Yes, you must comply with the law's requirements, and it is up to the local health jurisdiction to monitor compliance. Schools and businesses in a BOMA who generate 96 gallons or more of organic waste per week will be impacted by the law. For reference, 96 gallons is the size of a large household curbside waste bin.

School in an ORCA: Yes, you must comply with the law's requirements beginning in April 2030. Schools and businesses in an ORCA who generate 50 gallons or more of organic waste per week will be impacted by the law and need to have organics collection. For reference, 50 gallons is roughly half the size of a large curbside waste bin.

School is in both: If your school district or school is in both a BOMA and ORCA, you must comply with both requirements. The BOMA requirements are in effect, and the ORCA requirements start in 2030.



Q: What is considered organic material?

A: Organic materials are defined as "any solid waste that is a biological substance of plant or animal origin capable of microbial degradation" (RCW 70A.205.545). This includes manure, yard debris, food waste, food processing waste, wood waste, and garden waste.

More specifically, food waste includes waste from fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy products, fish, shellfish, nuts, seeds, grains, and similar materials that result from the storage, preparation, cooking, handling, selling, or serving of food for human consumption.

Yard debris includes grass clippings, leaves, small branches, pine needles, flowers, and any other yard waste material. **Schools should always ask their hauler and/or facility that processes their organic material about the specific accepted materials.**

Q: What if our schools' organic waste amounts vary throughout the year?

A: If your school or site exceeds the minimum amount of 96 gallons of organic waste for BOMA or 50 gallons of organic waste for ORCA at any point throughout the year, then you must comply with their respective requirements year-round.

Q: How will BOMA be enforced at my school?

A: Local jurisdictional health departments and solid waste departments share the enforcement authority for this law, and the enforcement methods can vary depending on their methods and practices. They may require schools to arrange for organics materials management services if a school or site generates more than the minimum threshold of organic waste per week. To better understand the enforcement methods and practices for your location, reach out to your local health department or solid waste department to begin these conversations.

Local jurisdictional health departments or solid waste departments must issue two written notices before issuing penalties. Additionally, they cannot charge schools a fee associated with the administration and enforcement of these requirements.

Q: How will ORCA be enforced at my school?

A: There is currently no enforcement body outlined in the ORCA statute ([RCW 70A.205.540](#)). The school or LEA site's local government will determine who is responsible for enforcing ORCA requirements. These details will be in an ordinance the City Council and/or County Commissioner must pass in order to require organics collection. This may be the solid waste department, local health department, and/or the hauler. Pay attention to local ordinances with future information.

Per [RCW 70A.205.540](#), there are no penalties for residential customers for the improper disposal of organic materials. Local governments are focused on a technical assistance approach to support impacted customers, like schools and LEA sites, working toward compliance.

Q: What does my school need to do to comply with the BOMA and ORCA requirements?

A: The law requires schools who are in a BOMA and/or ORCA to manage their organic material. This means that schools will need to separate their organics from their garbage and do one or more of the following to manage the organics material generated:

- Arrange for a hauler such as your existing waste hauler or another local organics hauler to provide service to your school to collect the organic materials and bring it to a composting facility.
- Manage all the organic materials with on-site composting, anaerobic digestion, or other methods. Check with local health jurisdictions for requirements and assistance.
- Arrange for organic materials from growing or harvesting food or fiber (like a school garden) to be used offsite by a business for growing food or fiber.
- Sell or donate organic materials to a business (i.e., a local farm) for off-site use.
- Self-haul organic materials to an organics management facility (like a composter, anaerobic digester, etc.).
- Implement organic material prevention programs that will help to reduce the amount of food waste or other materials that could be reused or repurposed.

Best practice is to understand the organic materials your school generates and identify a management strategy that will handle them according to your school's programs, priorities, and access to organics management services. We recommend using the organics management guide to identify what methods work best for your school.

Q: Who can provide these services? Will it be the same business that picks up my trash and recycling?

A: Any school located in a BOMA has access to organics collection services. This is often provided by a local hauler that also picks up your garbage and recycling. Check with your local hauler to see if they provide organics collection. If they don't, we recommend looking up your city or county website for local hauler information, or a quick internet search should help you find a hauler that does.

Q: Who at a school district is responsible for making sure schools are complying? Who will be contacted if we are out of compliance?

A: Each school and school district is different. Because enforcement is up to a school's local health jurisdiction or solid waste department, the school staff who will be contacted for education and enforcement on this law may vary. It's recommended that school district administrators and staff who handle organic materials are involved with any conversations about compliance and planning strategies to meet the requirements of this law. This could include a Resource Conservation Manager (RCM), facilities staff, custodial staff, nutrition service staff, and/or a principal and administrative staff.

It may also be helpful for schools to know who their contact will be at their local health jurisdiction and solid waste department. If desired, schools can reach out for answers to these questions and begin conversations with their local enforcement authority, as answers will differ between schools and school districts.

Q: What resources are available to help schools comply with the BOMA and ORCA requirements?

A: When looking for resources to help support schools in complying with the BOMA requirements, looking locally is the best first step. Some waste collection service providers (sometimes referred to as haulers) provide educational materials or programs and may help with securing equipment like bins for collection.

Your school's city or county solid waste management program may also have resources for you in the form of technical assistance and education. These resources may assist in training your staff or providing outreach to your students.

The Department of Ecology (Ecology) can provide technical assistance by answering questions and guiding schools to compliance. Reach out to Ecology's Organics team with questions at organics@ecy.wa.gov.

Q: Will there be grants or funding available to support schools with compliance?

A: Ecology's Food Center has started rulemaking for the [Sustainable Food Management Grants](#) (Chapter 173-316 WAC). This process will identify eligible projects, applicants, and funding amounts, including the potential to fund organics recovery programs. This will be completed in 2027.

Q: Are there other methods to reduce food waste in schools?

A: Implementing waste prevention methods can also help reduce the organic materials your school generates. Some common and effective tools to do this are:

- Appropriate forecasting and production
 - Utilizing batch cooking if possible
 - Reservice leftovers as appropriate
- Implementing “offer versus serve”:
 - [USDA Offer vs. Serve Manual](#)
 - [Offer vs Serve Reference Sheet](#)
 - [USDA Offer vs Serve Tip Sheets and Posters](#)
- Creating food share tables for unwanted edible food:
 - [Implementing Share Tables Reference Sheet](#)
 - [Running a Successful Share Table Guide](#)
 - [EPA’s Washington School Food Share Program Guide](#)
- Implementing 20-minute Lunch Duration:
 - [Schools Can Influence Student Eating Habits Through Lunch Scheduling Practices](#)
 - [B012-25 Seated Lunchtime Rulemaking](#)
- Taste testing and meal planning to get student feedback and reduce food waste:
 - [USDA Taste-Testing Event Resources](#)

Q: Are there other financial considerations to keep in mind?

A: Depending on the size and current solid waste services at your school or site, taking organic material out of the trash may provide cost savings and reduce your trash bill. Across the state, trash is typically more expensive to pick up and dispose of compared to recycling and organics collection. However, this ranges depending on where your school is located. If organics collection is cheaper than garbage collection, your school could see cost savings by diverting this waste into a cheaper collection service.

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Para solicitar una adaptación bajo la ADA, escriba a SWMPublications@ecy.wa.gov, llame al 360-407-6000, o marque el 711 para conectar con el Servicio de Retransmisión de Washington para servicios como teléfono de texto (TTY). Visite ecology.wa.gov/ADA para más información de accesibilidad.