

CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY INSTITUTE FOR URBAN PARKS

TRASH MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Trash Management and Recycling Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



Staff removes trash on a daily basis.



Collection spots in safe, strategic locations.

Every year, Central Park Conservancy receives hundreds of requests from all over the world to share what we have learned through our experience managing and restoring Central Park. In 2013, the Conservancy launched the Institute for Urban Parks, our educational arm, in part to address this interest in our work. The Institute teaches park users and managers to care for urban parks everywhere.

As one of two centers that make up the Institute, the Center for Urban Park Management shares the Conservancy's expertise with current and aspiring park professionals to elevate the urban park management profession.

This *Trash Management and Recycling Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)* is part of a series of resources intended to be useful tools for park managers. With the understanding that acreage, usage, budgets, staff, and volunteer capacity will vary from park to park, our FAQs present a broad overview of what Central Park Conservancy does, how that has changed over time, and the principles that guide the practices today. For a more comprehensive review of trash management and recycling in Central Park, please refer to the *Central Park Conservancy Institute for Urban Parks—Trash Management and Recycling Handbook*.

Overview

A comprehensive trash management and recycling program is a critical element of effective urban park management. From its founding in 1980, Central Park Conservancy placed a priority on trash management with its steady implementation of a zero-tolerance policy for both trash and graffiti. The resulting program has helped to make Central Park one of the most beautiful and inviting parks in the world.

Below are a series of frequently asked questions that detail the development and execution of the Conservancy's Trash Management and Recycling Program. They present a series of important concepts to consider when developing your own trash management and recycling program.

General Trash Management and Recycling



Steel drums throughout the Park landscape.



An overflowing toter enclosure.

Why is trash management important to Central Park Conservancy and to effective urban park management?

Trash management is critical to maintaining urban parks, not only because it results in a litter-free environment, but because the absence of litter and a clear presence of continual care encourages better stewardship and better treatment by the public. It also enhances the visitor experience, and helps to suppress pests. In addition to providing a more enjoyable experience for Park users, the program ultimately enhances the wellbeing of Central Park.

What are the first steps the Conservancy took in developing a trash management program?

From the beginning, the Conservancy approached the trash management process with the ultimate goal of “carry in, carry out” – creating systems that remove as much trash and the related management from the interior of the Park as possible. The first step was removal of the actual receptacles (steel drums) from the interior of landscapes and onto paved surface paths. In 1980, when the Conservancy began its first major renovation, the Sheep Meadow, the trash receptacles were removed from the lawn itself and placed at the exterior of the landscape. This accomplished two important things: it began the process of moving trash and trash collection out from the interior of the Park and thereby diverted vehicular traffic to the paths and drives. As the Conservancy renovated and restored landscapes and lawns, including the Great Lawn in 1997 and the North Meadow in 2000, it continued the gradual movement toward the goal of “carry in, carry out,” maintaining the method of removing trash receptacles from lawns and placing them at landscape exteriors or paved surfaces. The Conservancy also replaced the steel drums with more aesthetically pleasing wire baskets.

Building on this strategy, the Conservancy introduced large and small plastic toters in fixed locations, further streamlining the driving route of the trash collection trucks. Trash receptacle locations were further reduced (and eliminated entirely from playgrounds and the Park’s three woodland areas) and organized at key locations along paths, Park drives, and the perimeter. The solid plastic toter reduced contamination from pests, such as rodents, and additional small toters were used in a temporary capacity during peak seasons and larger Park events.

General Trash Management and Recycling (CONTINUED)



Plastic trash and recycling totes.



Staff emptying the new recycling receptacles.

When did the Conservancy integrate recycling into the Trash Management Program?

In 2007, the Conservancy began its recycling program, initially at athletic fields, and then expanded to highly visited locations throughout the Park such as The Mall and Bethesda Terrace. By 2010, the Conservancy had implemented the recycling program Parkwide with color-coded plastic totes alongside the existing trash totes.

From 2013 to 2014, the Conservancy launched its current trash and recycling management system, replacing the plastic totes with 700 newly designed receptacles made from partially recycled aluminum. The current trash and recycling strategy, funded by the Alcoa Foundation, further reduces pests, minimizes vehicles on paths, and increases recycling. The strategic layout of the trash receptacles and collection points minimizes the number of locations for trash accumulation in the Park, placing priority on the Park drives and entrances. Currently, the Conservancy recycles cans, bottles, newspapers, and magazines.

How does the Conservancy measure the success of the Trash Management and Recycling Program?

The Conservancy measures success by monitoring the weight of trash and recycling collected in the Park, monitoring Park conditions at the Zone level through visual inspections by staff, and tracking feedback on litter conditions from the Park-using public.

Collection Methodology & Operations



Before collection trucks drove on narrow paths to remove trash.



Today collection points are relocated to the Park drives.

How does the Conservancy determine the placement of trash and recycling receptacles?

The locations of the trash and recycling receptacles are based on several key factors:

- **Safety:** By minimizing the number of receptacles in landscapes and internal paths and relocating them to Park drives and at entrances, the Conservancy reduced vehicular traffic related to collection, which enhances the safety of both the public and Conservancy staff.
- **Daily usage and need:** Informed by our 2009 Park user survey, the Conservancy added multiple trash receptacles in highly visited areas and provided additional recycling opportunities to meet public demand.
- **Pest control:** By reducing the number of receptacles, the Conservancy reduced the number of locations that attract rodents.

How does the Conservancy accomplish consistent daily removal of trash?

The Zone Management System, pioneered by the Conservancy, divides the Park landscapes into 49 distinct maintenance “Zones,” with a dedicated staff member assigned to each. Zone-based staff begins each day with trash collection, inspecting every aspect of the landscape, removing trash and recycling, and emptying receptacles.

The priority of trash pick-up as the first issue addressed each and every day and the consistent upkeep by the Zone Management System ensures the zero-tolerance culture for trash in the Park and is invaluable to the success of the Trash Management and Recycling Program. Throughout the day, staff maintains the receptacles by sweeping the area, wiping down the exteriors, and cleaning the interiors when bags are replaced.

What kinds of equipment does the Conservancy use to manage trash and recycling?

All staff manually collects trash and recycling from landscapes using a grabber and trash or recycling bags. A Zone-based staff member removes disposable trash and recycling bags from the receptacles and transports the bags to defined collection spots along the main Park drives. Trash and recycling collection trucks follow a detailed route around the Park, removing the bags from the collection spots and transporting the trash and recycling to New York City Department of Sanitation facilities. This strategy prioritizes the use of manual trash removal in the interior of the Park and focuses the use of vehicles to pathways and ultimately, for the largest vehicles, the Park drives.

Why does the Conservancy use a manual form of trash and recycling collection in the Park?

With increasing Park usage as a primary concern, the Conservancy determined that a manual form of trash and recycling collection would promote safer work practices and an improved visitor experience. Though this is more

Collection Methodology & Operations (CONTINUED)



Staff manually removes trash bags from landscapes.



An electric-powered recycling vehicle.

labor intensive, a manual process is better for public safety and more environmentally friendly. By removing trash and recycling manually, the Conservancy keeps vehicular traffic out of Park landscapes, reduces vehicular traffic on paths, and allows trash and recycling to be consolidated in collection spots along the Park drives. As a result, the large trash and recycling trucks remain on the Park drives and off of pedestrian paths.

How often does the Conservancy empty the trash and recycling receptacles?

The receptacles are emptied throughout the day, as needed. Typically, trash and recycling is removed at the start of the day and then on a regular basis throughout the shift. During peak periods, receptacles can be emptied multiple times a day in highest traffic areas.

In response to an increase in Park usage after the end of the regular daytime work shift (after 3:00 pm), the Conservancy now employs a Night Operations staff to assume the responsibility of the trash and recycling management process when the day staff leaves in the afternoon. Primarily focused on trash pick-up and removal, Night Operations works from 2:00 pm to 10:30 pm in season (April – November) and 1:00 pm to 9:30 pm off-season (December – March). This shift was integrated into Park Operations in 1998 to ensure that trash was being handled well into peak evening hours. This allows the day staff to begin their shift the following morning with significantly less trash removal work so that they can move on to other horticultural tasks more quickly.

Trash collection truck operators cover the Park between 7:00 am and 12:00 am to accommodate both the daytime and nighttime operations.

How does the Conservancy work to prevent contamination in the recycling program?

The design of the receptacles is intuitive and communicative – the color of the receptacle and the shape of the receptacle opening indicate what type of material goes into each receptacle. Written communication on the sides of the receptacles also states the intention. Accompanying signage and communication via the Conservancy's website provide further information.

Does the Conservancy alter the Trash Management and Recycling Program during the off-season or during off-hours?

The volume of trash and recycling material changes, depending on the season or time of day, but the process of the Trash Management and Recycling Program remains the same. The Zone-based staff inspects the Zones, the trash and recycling trucks follow the prescribed route around the Park, and the Night Operations staff continues this process into the afternoon and evening hours.

Trash & Recycling Receptacle Design



The new trash and recycling receptacles.



The intuitive opening indicates the shape of a can or bottle.

What factors influenced the trash and recycling receptacle design?

The receptacle design included considerations for durability, flexibility, sustainability, aesthetics, pest prevention, and ease of handling by staff. The Conservancy needed a receptacle that could remain outdoors year-round and that would prevent the disposable bags, used as liners, from becoming too heavy for an individual staff member to remove safely. The Conservancy also required a flexible, moveable receptacle to accommodate special events, construction work, and public safety procedures. The receptacle was also designed to hamper rodents' ability to climb inside. An aesthetically pleasing receptacle made of sustainable material is consistent with the Conservancy's mission to enhance the Park.

How did the receptacle design change the Conservancy's Trash Management and Recycling Program?

The new receptacles catalyzed the integration of a completely manual removal process of trash and recycling from the Park interior, enhancing visitor experience and promoting safer work practices. The intuitive design and clear labeling of the receptacles reduced the contamination of recyclable materials by the public and afforded Park visitors increased recycling opportunities.

Working with the Public



Signs inform visitors how to properly dispose of trash and recycling.

LET'S TALK TRASH!

A NEW TRASH SYSTEM FOR A CLEANER, GREENER PARK



CENTRAL PARK
CONSERVANCY
central to the park



An illustrative sign featured at a Conservancy event.

How does the Conservancy engage and inform the public about its Trash Management and Recycling Program?

As the program was introduced in the Park, a concerted education effort supported its implementation, including talking points for staff and a related public communication strategy. On a day-to-day basis, Zone-based staff, serving as representatives of the Conservancy, engages with Park visitors, communicating changes and updates about the program. Accompanying signage details the trash management and recycling process at various receptacle sites throughout the Park. Additional signage promotes the program at the visitor centers, playgrounds, and on light poles throughout the Park interior. The Conservancy also communicates through social media via the Conservancy's website, Facebook, and Twitter accounts. User groups, such as athletic leagues, schools, tours, and dog-owning communities, meet regularly with the Conservancy to discuss program goals.

How does the Conservancy handle public health and safety as it relates to trash management and recycling, such as rodents and "urban miners" (individuals who collect bottles and cans for redemption)?

The Conservancy monitors pest activity and employs sustainable control methods such as burrow harassment and preventative measures in compliance with all relevant laws. Although the receptacles were designed with a locking mechanism, the Conservancy chose not to lock them as a preventative measure to avoid vandalism of the receptacles. This enables urban miners to access recyclables without damaging Park property.

How does the Conservancy work with third-party vendors such as concessionaires and film crews to manage their trash and recycling?

A firm "carry in, carry out" policy is integrated into contracts and agreements whenever possible. Concessionaires are responsible for maintenance and removal of trash and recycling at their concession as well as the 50-foot area surrounding the concession. Film crews are responsible for continual maintenance during their shoot and removal of all materials upon leaving the Park. Third-party vendors are required to comply with all rules and regulations of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation (NYC Parks).

What happens to trash and recyclables during large special events?

Third-party event sponsors are responsible for removal of trash and recycling as per their event permit and agreement with NYC Parks. For Conservancy-sponsored events or NYC Parks events, the Conservancy follows the same protocols of the daily Park operation. Supplementary receptacles may be used for the duration of the event and are removed upon its completion.

Getting Started

Keep in mind the following principles and practices when starting a trash management and recycling program in your park.

- A clean environment encourages the public to use the Park responsibly; promotes stewardship by the staff and the public; and provides the foundation for further improvements, like horticulture.
- When beginning to develop a trash management and recycling program, identify your organization's key priorities and goals – build the program on those aspirations. For the Conservancy, the Program's goals were (and are) maintaining landscapes; enhancing safety; encouraging public stewardship; preventing pests; and advancing a “carry in, carry out” policy where possible.
- Integrating a zero-tolerance policy for trash at all levels of Park management keeps the Park consistently well-maintained, builds an internal dedication to trash management, and is a visible indicator to visitors of a commitment to park maintenance and on-going stewardship.
- Dedicated and accountable staff is better able to manage trash. When staff knows the landscape well, including patterns of use, they can devote extra attention to problem areas or times of day, ensuring trash levels are managed effectively. A clean, well-maintained receptacle encourages proper and regular usage by visitors.
- Develop a plan for communicating the strategies of trash management and recycling for both park staff and park visitors. Park staff can serve as ambassadors and provide communication through daily interaction with Park visitors. Identify key partners (regular Park user groups or third-party vendors, for example) and provide regular updates through meetings, mailings, and social media.

If you have additional questions, please contact the Institute for Urban Parks at centralparknyc.org/institute | institute@centralparknyc.org | [@cpcinstitute](https://twitter.com/cpcinstitute) | 212.310.6678



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