What Shall We Do
About Ann Arbor's New Compost Rules?

It was groundbreaking *in 2014 when Ann Arbor began accepting all plate food scraps in its compost program along with a large range of cups and serviceware that were labeled BPI-certified.* ***In 2024, however, the City's compost site operator banned many types of food service products*** *in order to improve the quality of the compost end-product and to remedy certain problems that had arisen.* ***More information is posted at www.a2gov.org/compost..***

Because the website information does not answer many of the questions that arise when one tries to follow the new rules, ***ICPJ has created this hand-out.*** *This process is still emerging, so some of the following is likely to change—hopefully for the better!*

Why does all this matter? ***Food waste buried in landfills is a leading source of methane emissions****--a powerful greenhouse gas that contributes significantly to climate change. Other organic products such as compostable dishes also produce methane if landfilled. Composting significantly reduces methane release and results in a beneficial soil product that has many positive uses.*

Three General Ways to Handle Ann Arbor's January 1, 2024 Changes in Composting Rules for Disposable Products

If your congregation is using compostable dishes, you will probably need to make some choices as you respond to the new rules for Ann Arbor's WeCare Denali Composting facility. We're suggesting three general strategies. **To some extent, you can mix and match—or you can choose only one and stay with that.**

1. Stop using disposables and shift to reusables

This is a great choice, ethically. While compostables (when composted!) are a better choice for the environment than polystyrene (what we think of as Styrofoam) or other plastic, they still require energy to grow the materials and to produce and transport the finished product. Buying and washing dishes takes energy too, but (done properly over time), it takes less energy.*

Everyone's situation is different, so think about what would work for your congregation. A number of congregations have moved to reusable (washable) cups. For some snacks, paper napkins (which can be composted) may be sufficient (as opposed to plates).

and/or

2. Continue to use Ann Arbor's WeCare Denali Composting facility, following their new rules



NOT ACCEPTED:

NO compostable plastic, either hard or "film" (soft plastic bags)
Anything made of bamboo, sugarcane (with rare exception) or palm leaf

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*"Reusable dishware uses far less energy and resources over its lifetime – often thousands of uses in a restaurant or home setting – than its disposable counterparts." Durable Dishware Instead of Disposables, Portland.gov. Although this depends somewhat on how you wash the dishes and what the durable product is made of, most dishes surpass disposables in 25 uses or less.

ACCEPTED PRODUCTS, GENERAL CRITERIA:

PAPER (fiber) products including paper bags, napkins, tissues, paper towels, coffee filters, pizza boxes (including food/grease-stained; if not stained, they can be either composted or recycled), and uncoated* paper plates are all OK. **The city says that if a paper item is not lined/ coated*) and is labeled compostable then residents can use that item.**

***To tell if a product is "unlined"** (uncoated), look for a coating inside or outside the material that has a shine to it; paperboard and cardboard are not naturally shiny. You can also try to tear the material to see if it has a lining. To test if it is wax lined, try to scratch it. If residue comes off, it is likely to be coated with wax. **Acceptable paper plates are often labeled "uncoated" on the package** (unlike many products)**.**

To tell if a product is made of paper*,* the packaging of the product (or description, if buying online), is the best way to identify that a product is made of paper and not some other material. ***This may not be a fool-proof method; we would appreciate feedback about how often packaging fails to indicate the composition.***

HOW TO FIND SPECIFIC ACCEPTED PRODUCTS:

Finding acceptable products has been a challenge but is getting better. Here are a number of possibilities. Things will no doubt change over time. *(Note: We're not recommending any of these over others you may find.)*

1. The City provided us with a searchable spreadsheet of the kinds of products congregations are likely to use. Many of these need to be ordered online**.** Compostable Product Options.xlsx

2. The Ecology Center provided us with a chart, "Alternatives to Lined Paper Items and BPI Cups" (Created by the Education Team, Ecology Center, Ann Arbor MI, 2024.) These are also online.

3. Local suppliers (Brick & Mortar) – The following carry at least some acceptable products; there are likely other stores that do as well. See City spreadsheet link above (Staples, Walgreens) and section below (People's Food Coop, Meijers) for more detail. See next section for more on BGreen Today. ***If you find other products available locally that meet the new standards, please let us know and we'll try to share the information***

Some Local Brick-and-Mortar Options not on City Chart:

People's Food Coop: Plates and bowls. (Their cups do not meet current specifications but they will take back anything compostable that you buy there and compost it.)

Meijers: True Goodness paper plates (2 sizes), bowls and cups.

and/or

3. Continue to use BPI-Certified Products No Longer Accepted for Composting by the City but Dispose of them Via Another Composter or in Trash

If you are outside the city limits, you can contract with MI Green Michigan *(https://www.mygreenmi.com/)* **for a weekly pick-up.** They take recyclables to a facility they use in Wixon, MI that composts these products. You can contract with MI Green Michigan inside the city limits as well, but the City says you will need to follow the Denali composting guidelines.

We are aware of a congregation that is exploring another compost collection business but do not have enough information yet to include this. If interested to learn what we hear, check with janwrigh@umich.edu

DO NOT PUT CONTAINERS LABELED COMPOSTABLE INTO YOUR RECYCLING!

It will cause contamination, and the recyclable items that they are mixed with may end up in the landfill!

Thank you so much to Mallory Lawson (City of Ann Arbor), Mackenzie Munro (Ecology Center), Sandy Simon and Nancy Stone for their help in creating this document!
Compiled by Jan Wright (janwrigh@umich.edu). Produced by Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice (ICPJ), Caucus on Consumption, Waste & the Climate Crisis, March 2024.

Updates:

The City's CMA-W webpage has been updated, so it now includes the "Purchasing Guide" of approved compostables.

See Food Waste Composting Sheet on next page!

For members of your congregation who live in Ann Arbor:

HOW TO COMPOST FOOD WASTE
NOW THAT YOU CAN'T USE COMPOSTABLE BAGS!

If you live in Ann Arbor, you can put any and all table scraps into your compost bin. (You probably know that but not everyone does!)

HINTS FOR DEALING WITH THE "ICK" FACTOR WHEN COMPOSTING FOOD SCRAPS

Until January 1, 2024, Ann Arbor residents could use compostable "plastic" bags to line a kitchen compost container and put into their compost bin. **At this point, Ann Arbor does not allow any kind of bag other than paper—nothing that has a waterproof liner, even if it is compostable**. It is possible this will change at some point—the field is young and industrial composters around the country are requiring different things as they try to solve problems that have arisen. Currently, however, those are the rules in Ann Arbor.

Here are some things that have worked for others.

None of them will fit everyone's needs, but some might fit yours —or give you an idea of how you might improvise.

IN THE KITCHEN

Use a compostable bag in your kitchen container but dump only the loose waste into your A2 compost cart. (Can also store it in refrigerator or freezer.) The disadvantage to this is, you will need to trash the compostable bag. A container with a charcoal filter will reduce odor.

Store a paper bag in your freezer and fill with scraps. Then put the whole thing into your compost cart.

Make a liner out of newspaper. (It's really easy! Check out this "How-to" video)

- **https://youtu.be/SPH7A3sf_PI?si=m0LDihUYpInNt0jW.**

IN YOUR A2 COMPOST CART

Put something substantial at the bottom of your cart to dump loose food scraps on--a pizza box, leaves, a newspaper etc.

Place a large paper yard-waste bag inside your cart and fill with food scraps.

More information on Ann Arbor's Compostable collection program is posted at www.a2gov.org/compost .



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