



Case Study: Wagner Houses Waste & Recycling Containerization Pilot NYC Housing Authority

The Housing Authority

With over 177,000 apartments housing approximately 400,000 residents, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is the largest public housing authority in North America.

Recognized as the first of its kind in the United States, NYC Housing Authority was established in 1934 as a means to help alleviate the housing crisis caused by the Great Depression. In modern times, NYCHA continues to provide affordable housing for low and moderate income city residents throughout the boroughs of New York City, in addition to enabling access to public and community services. Their housing developments include single and multi-family homes, apartments, and communal buildings.

The Public Housing Development

Situated in the East Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan, Wagner Houses is a NYCHA public housing development consisting of 16-story and 7-story towers across a total of 22 buildings. Construction of Wagner Houses was completed in 1958 and now provides a home for over 5,000 residents in 2,162 apartments. The development

was named after Senator Robert F. Wagner, who successfully served four terms as Senator of New York State.

Waste & Recycling Containerization Pilot

The Challenges

As with many public authority housing developments, it is widely acknowledged that the trash provision on NYCHA apartment blocks is no longer fit for purpose given the need to reduce environmental impact with a robust zero-waste strategy. The use of chutes discourages recycling and with large accumulations of trash bags around building entrances awaiting collection, alongside instances of large trash bags being thrown from upstairs windows, there are serious issues of vermin and illegal dumping to contend with.

These issues impact negatively on neighborhood quality and with previous attempts to encourage recycling having only a limited overall effect, the NYCHA team were looking for innovative ways to help residents dispose of household waste responsibly and deliver wider qualitative improvements throughout the Wagner Houses development.

The Solution

At metroSTOR we understand in detail the challenges of both multifamily and non-market housing environments and using our 5C methodology have worked closely with the NYCHA team to create user-friendly deposit-points for recycling and large trash bags. 3 of the Wagner Houses tower blocks have been selected for the pilot, providing a comprehensive cross-section across the development, with consideration being given to specific locations outside the main entrances for convenient use by residents, access for site staff, improvements in the appearance of the grounds and helping remove opportunities for illegal dumping.

In each of the 3 pilot locations the waste and recycling deposit point consists of an identical series of 3 metroSTOR B-Series Dumpster Housings. A metroSTOR BD400 secures the 2 yd dumpster for Trash, a second metroSTOR BD400 unit secures the 2 yd dumpster for Paper & Cardboard and a metroSTOR BC130 the 2no. 65 gal.carts for Metal, Glass & Plastic collections.

Clear, highly visible instructions on what materials should go in each container are provided in 3 languages along with associated line drawings and color coded doors specific to the waste stream type, help reduce contamination rates and ensure that the facilities are accessible and safe for everyone to use.

The Outcomes

As a first step of the pilot scheme, NYCHA staff conducted a communications campaign that provided insight into the new changes to infrastructure and ensured that all residents had access to reusable recycling bags for their household kitchens.

So far the pilot has been a success, with large quantities of clean recycling coming from each block, easier emptying of waste containers by the site staff and a marked reduction in rodent presence and illegal dumping.

metroSTOR continues to monitor the pilot regularly with the NYCHA team, suggesting operational improvements and adjustments to the units to optimize performance.

“The metroSTOR recycling stations currently at NYCHA’s Wagner Houses are durable and remain tidy one year following the installation. NYCHA residents have positively embraced the new system, stating the containers are much cleaner and more attractive than the previous system. The stations encourage recycling, and the larger apertures allow larger bags of waste and bulky cardboard to be deposited easily. Overall, the stations have positively impacted waste diversion rates, particularly for paper/cardboard, as the units are larger and more conveniently located.”

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