

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Seattle's proposed Yellow Pages Opt-Out System
(updated 9/10/10)

How is the City proposing to reduce the number of unwanted yellow pages phone books?

Councilmember Mike O'Brien proposes Seattle create a single centralized, opt-out system for yellow pages phone books to provide residents with a simple and reliable system for managing phone books that get delivered to their homes and businesses in an effort to reduce the number of unwanted phone books in our waste stream.

What's the difference between an opt-in and opt-out system?

An opt-out system will allow residents who do not want to receive yellow pages phone books to indicate this preference and prohibits yellow pages publishers from distributing books to those who are on the list.

An opt-in system would restrict distribution to residents who choose to receive yellow pages.

At this time, Seattle is considering creating an opt-out system.

What type of opt-out systems currently exist?

The Yellow Pages Association and many yellow pages publishers offer voluntary opt-out programs. The city of Seattle is proposing to create a centralized opt-out system so that residents can opt-out of all yellow pages phone books with a single click or call, and the city can assist consumers with regulation and enforcement of opt-out requests.

If you would like to participate in current programs, please go to: www.yellowpagesoptout.com and www.selectyourdex.com.

How will residents "opt out"?

Residents will be able to indicate their preference online, via phone, or via pre-paid postcard that will be attached to all yellow pages phone books distributed in Seattle.

If I want to receive a yellow pages phone book, can I still get one?

Yes, if you would like to receive yellow pages directories, they will continue to be delivered unless you choose to opt-out. The opt-out system will also let consumers specify the number of directories they would like to receive.

How will the new opt-out system be regulated by the City?

Seattle will create a business license category specifically for yellow pages publishers. Honoring the opt-out system will be required for all licensees, and licenses must be renewed annually.

Residents who opt-out and still receive a phone book can file a complaint with the city. A threshold number of complaints will trigger an investigation. Penalties will be based upon the findings of an investigation, beginning with small fines and the possible suspension of a business license for repeated and egregious violations. The details of this penalty system will be outlined in a Seattle Public Utilities Director's Rule.

Is there a way to also opt-out of unwanted direct mail?

[Catalog Choice](#) offers a user-friendly portal for opting out of direct mail.

In January 2010, the Council passed [Resolution 31169](#) urging the state of Washington to create a state-wide Do Not Mail registry.

How will this affect businesses?

Many businesses use yellow pages directories to advertise their services. In 2009, advertisers receiving the highest number of calls from yellow pages advertising were Pawnbrokers, truck rental and leasing and auto wrecking and used parts businesses.¹

Advertisers will still be able to reach residents who use yellow-pages directories to find local businesses.

What are the costs associated with the opt-out system and how will it be funded?

Yellow Pages Publishers will be asked to cover two costs associated with yellow pages delivery in Seattle: the cost of recycling unwanted books and the cost of administering the opt-out system. A recovery fee of 40 cents will be placed on each book delivered.

What is the percentage of phone books in Seattle's waste stream?

Seattle's approximately 275,000 households recycle 2,231 tons of paper from phone books annually. Phone books represent approximately 3% of all recycled paper, by weight from the residential sector².

How does this fit into Seattle's Zero Waste Agenda?

In 2007, the City Council unanimously adopted a zero waste strategy to increase recycling, reduce garbage and upgrade Seattle's transfer Stations. The Council set a goal that 60% of all waste in Seattle be recycled by 2012.

Other approaches to reduce products in the waste stream:

- replacing styrofoam food service ware with compostable or recyclable materials;
- extending organic food waste pick up to all single family homes in 2009, and multi-family homes in 2010;
- passing [Resolution 31169](#) in January 2010, calling for Washington to establish a Do Not Mail registry.

More on the Council's Zero Waste priorities is available [online](#).

What about white pages?

Washington State law (WAC 480-120-251) requires phone companies to publish and distribute residential white pages directories, and any opt-out/in system including white pages would require changing state law.

What's the timeline?

The Seattle Public Utilities and Neighborhoods Committee will consider legislation creating the opt-out system in August and September. The first discussion was on August 10th and the next discussion will be September 13th. All committee meetings are at 2pm in Council Chambers and provide an opportunity for public testimony at the beginning of the meeting.

The opt-out system would go into effect in 2011.

Who can I contact if I have more questions?

Esther Handy in Councilmember O'Brien's Office is happy to answer additional questions about this proposal: esther.handy@seattle.gov, 206-684-8800.

¹ Yellow Pages Association Metered Ad study - "Yellow Pages Facts and Figures: Tracking Calls in the Seattle Market."

² 2005 Residential Recycling Composition Study, Chart 4. New report available in 2011.