

Seattle dumping 700 Dumpsters from downtown alleys

By Emily Heffter
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Seattle's downtown will soon be free of one of the most ubiquitous back-alley symbols: Dumpsters.

The city is removing about 700 Dumpsters from the alleys in downtown Seattle and will instead collect trash from businesses several times a day. By clearing out the bulky bins, business deliveries should be easier and illegal activity harder to hide, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) officials said Monday.

"Dumpsters in the alley create a cover for crime," said Tom Gannon, a planner for SPU.

Drivers for CleanScapes, the company that recently got the \$20 million contract for Central and Northeast Seattle's trash collection, will make the rounds several times a day in green trucks.

Business owners will buy bags — different colors for recycling, trash and compost — and leave them in squares painted in the alley. Most alleyways will have trash pickup about three times a day.

Business owners in Pioneer Square have been participating in a voluntary "Dumpster-Free Alley" pilot program for about eight years.

Many cities use similar programs. Since customers pay for pickup by the bag, the city hopes the change will cut down on trash, too.

CleanScapes founder Chris Martin said he used to live above an alley in Pioneer Square. From his window, he said he could see "lots of inappropriate adult behavior" going on in the spaces between Dumpsters, "and lots of odors that weren't so pleasant." He quit his desk job to start CleanScapes, which now serves parts of Portland, San Francisco, Seattle and Shoreline.

The clear-alleys program will be mandatory for businesses south of Denny Way and west of Interstate 5.



GREG GILBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Jeremy Simatic with CleanScapes throws color-coded bags of trash into a collection truck in the alley between Second and Third avenues on James Street.



Chris Martin, president, founder of CleanScapes

Jim Alongi's business, Hole in the Wall Barbecue on James Street near Pioneer Square, has been participating in the pilot project. He said at a city news conference that buying the bags has cost about the same as his Dumpster service did.

Also, the alley is cleaner, Alongi said, and the problems some people feared — rats, birds ripping open the bags — have not happened.

"I say 'get on board,' " he said. "This is something the city has gotten right."

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