

Scavenging (Theft of Recyclables) Frequently Asked Questions

What is scavenging and is it a crime?

Taking recyclables or trash from garbage or recycling containers at homes or businesses for personal use (or fundraising) is called scavenging. It is considered theft and a misdemeanor violation under [Mountain View City Code](#) Sec. 16.22 subject to citation or arrest.

Can I give permission to take my recyclables from containers?

Once materials are set out in containers for collection, they become the property of the City and its hauler. Property owners may never give permission to anyone to remove items from containers, but may set aside recyclables for donation in a different location than the set out and on a different day than regular collection.

What should I do if I see someone taking recycling from carts or dumpsters?

If you see someone other than the City or Recology employees taking recyclables or trash from either garbage or recycling containers at homes or businesses, report scavenging in progress by immediately calling the Mountain View Police Department non-emergency dispatcher at (650) 903-6395.

You can also report scavenging using [AskMV](#). Choose "Police Department > Reporting Crimes" and be sure to make the first word of your description "Scavenging." You can choose to skip providing contact information, but it helps us if we need to follow up with you for further information or to check on reoccurrence.

By reporting scavenging, you will help us identify patterns and areas where repetitive scavenging is occurring. Please try to note the date and time of the occurrence, a description of the person, and the method of collection (bag, shopping cart, or vehicle with make/model and license number if easily available). If the scavenging occurs on a regular basis, please let the dispatcher know or note that in the online report. A police officer will try and be present at that time to warn or cite the scavenger. **Do not approach the scavenger on your own.**

Please keep reporting scavenging each time it occurs so that the Police can establish a track record of areas that might need special enforcement. Do not be discouraged if your first call was considered a lower priority, or if you are directed to use the online reporting system.

What can I do to prevent scavenging?

Set out your containers the morning of trash collection day (no later than 7 a.m.) Put bottles and cans with California redemption value at the bottom of the cart underneath other recyclables if you can.

If you must set out your container the night before, keep bottles and cans with redemption value separate and place in the cart the next morning before collection.

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Please do not give permission to fundraisers to remove recyclables or garbage from any container. A permit is required and you must set the items aside in a container separate from the carts and on a different day than regular collection.

Report scavenging in progress to Police at (650) 903-6395 or fill out an online crime report to Police each time it occurs.

Are fundraisers allowed to take recycling or garbage from our containers?

Fundraising activities are allowed under certain conditions, but fundraisers may never remove items from garbage and recycling containers (even if the resident or business gives permission). For example, only non-profit organizations with a special recycling fundraising permit from the City may collect recycling if it is set aside for them by the donor; placed in a bag or box on private property away from regular containers; and is collected on a different day than scheduled garbage and recycling collection.

How does scavenging hurt?

Scavenging is prohibited by Mountain View City Code for a variety of reasons. The act of scavenging creates a public nuisance of noise and litter, and can make residents feel threatened by someone going through their containers. The revenue from recycling is used to help offset the costs of collection and keeps utility rates low.