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Summary
Portland's largest public construction projects promise high recycling rates, yet COR Disposal and Recycling repeatedly sent recyclable materials to landfills while misreporting results. Metro issued multiple violations, and auditors found deception across agencies. GreenWay Recycling warns taxpayers are being misled and urges officials to stop awarding contracts to COR.

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Greenwashing in Portland's Public Projects: A Case for Reforming Public Contracts

By Naomi Inman

The Portland region has a reputation for being one of the most environmentally friendly places in the nation. But reputations don't always hold up to facts—like the fact that very little recycling is happening on taxpayer-funded government construction projects in the area. It's a classic case of **greenwashing**, where environmental claims turn out to be false or misleading.

A local recycling company has once again been penalized for doing just that. COR (City of Roses) Disposal and Recycling in NE Portland was caught tossing hundreds of tons of recyclable material from government contracts into the landfill over the past seven years.

Metro, the regional solid waste authority, issued a notice of violation against COR, finding: "COR voluntarily disclosed to Metro that it incorrectly reported drywall/gypsum as recycled, although it ultimately disposed of 409 tons of source-separated recyclable material between 2019 and April 2016." According to the notice, those 409 tons equal 87 dumpster truckloads.

Metro also found that COR "failed to maintain and report accurate records" for a variety of other materials—including rock, plastics, and wood—over the last three years. Similar problems surfaced last December, when Metro issued a notice of violation and a $10,000 fine to COR. According to reporting in *The Oregonian*, COR was taking debris from the Oregon Convention Center and throwing it in the landfill instead of recycling it as claimed.

After that notice, Metro staff were so concerned about COR's practices that they recommended the company receive only a one-year renewal for its waste facility franchise. The Metro Council instead granted a 5-year renewal with the assurance that corrective action would follow if compliance issues continued.

During the council meeting, COR CEO Alando Simpson testified, "We are committed to full transparency with Metro staff and council. We're not running from accountability; in fact, we're leaning into it."

COR has received most of the construction and demolition waste recycling contracts for major public works projects in Portland in recent years. These include the Portland Airport remodel, Multnomah County libraries, Portland State University buildings, the City of Portland Wastewater Treatment Plant, and Portland Public Schools' new high schools.

All of these projects follow lofty green-building standards that call for recycling as much construction and demolition debris as possible. If these government projects are promised that over 80% of waste material from the job site will be recycled—but less than 20% is actually recovered—that's greenwashing.

Metro's list of violations connects the dots, according to GreenWay Recycling in NW Portland. GreenWay has spent years examining the numbers and advocating for better transparency in local recycling practices. The award-winning company holds national certification and has the highest recycling rates for construction waste in Oregon.

GreenWay has filed complaints with multiple government agencies and good government hotlines. Auditors with the City of Portland and Portland Public Schools have investigated COR's recycling practices. As Cascade Policy previously reported, the Multnomah County Auditor found that COR defrauded the county in its attempt to achieve LEED certification for several bond-funded library construction projects.

GreenWay CEO Terrell Garrett has been searching for answers. "Why is the Portland School District considering this company for the Jefferson High School project when they know COR produced very little recycling for the other school renovation projects they worked on?" asked Garrett. "I'm baffled as to why government agencies continue to award taxpayer-funded projects to this contractor even after they learn they're being deceived about the amount of material being recycled? It's just sad that bad actors like this are ripping off the environment and ripping off taxpayers while government does very little to hold them accountable."

Garrett believes much of this greenwashing would disappear if the city held COR accountable for these misleading practices and if more Portlanders spoke up to their elected leaders and urged them to stop contracting with COR for public works projects.

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