

MUD 113 Newsletter

May, 2019

The Changing Landscape in the Recycle Trash Business

Through 2017 China had been the major customer for the world's recyclables, taking 30% overall and nearly half of global recyclable mixed paper and plastics. Last year China instituted a ban on mixed paper and plastics and a 0.5% contamination limit on imported loads of recyclables. This caused huge pressure on global markets, which ultimately impacted recycling programs in communities across the USA. In some locations curbside recyclables were going to landfill due to falling commodity prices and higher processing costs.

Locally, our service provider, Waste Management, does not back blend recycle material into the regular trash to get rid of it. Despite challenging market conditions, they maintain a capital commitment to the recycle market. Residents also continue to believe that recycling is an important community value, the "right thing to do". The sustainability of any recycling program is now dependent upon collecting high quality, recyclable materials free of unacceptable materials. WM continues to invest in technology to process cleaner material, and we must do our part to send them clean materials. Following is a summary of the most common contaminants that must be kept out of the recycle bin:

- Flexible plastic bags, i.e., common trash bags, and flexible film packaging;
- Foods and Liquids;
- Electronics and Small Appliances;
- Textiles, Bedding, Rugs, Carpeting;
- Hoses, Christmas Tree Lights, Hangers, Extension Cords;
- Paper Napkins, Plates, Cups, and Tissues;
- Polystyrene Foam;
- Tires, Auto Parts, Scrap Metal, Batteries;
- Concrete, Wood, and Construction Debris;
- Yard Waste.

On the other hand, here is a list of materials that always should be recycled. Only clean and dry material should be placed into the recycle bin. Grease, food particles, soil, and liquids such as milk, wine, and soda should be rinsed away:

- Plastic Bottles and Containers;
- Food and Beverage Cans;
- Paper;
- Flattened cardboard and Paperboard;
- Food and Beverage Cartons;
- Glass Bottles and Containers.

Currently, recycle contamination levels average around 25%. This means for every ton of recyclables collected, 500 pounds of contaminants must be removed to meet market quality standards. Human as well as automated methods of contaminant separation are employed at the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) in Houston. Separation and disposal costs increase if unit shutdown becomes necessary to remove things such as entangled hoses, bags, etc and occasional outrageous items such as dead animals, engine blocks, and bowling balls!

The typical single stream composition coming into the MRF contains 30% corrugated cardboard, 22% mixed paper, 21% glass, 3% High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) plastic, 2% Polyethylene Phthalate (PET) plastic, and less than 1% each of mixed plastic, aluminum, and steel. The remainder is contaminant residue. The only streams that have positive value are corrugated cardboard, PET, HDPE, aluminum, and steel. As far as where these streams go in today's recycle marketplace, recent data shows 68% to domestic mills, about 16% to India, 7% to Southeast Asia, only 5% to China, and lesser amounts to Mexico and Italy.

In summary, we should recycle Often and Right. Our current recycle percentage in MUD 113 is only around 10%. We can recycle more, but we must do it smartly!