

RECYCLING Q&A

What is the proper way to recycle?

Combine the following five core items in your recycling container. Do not bag them. No other items should be placed in your recycling. And when in doubt, throw it out.

The CORE ITEMS:

- **CANS:** Empty and rinse.
- **CARTONS:** Empty and rinse. Replace the cap — it's too small to be recycled by itself!
- **GLASS:** Empty and rinse.
- **PAPER & BOXES:** Flatten cardboard items, like cereal boxes, to save space.
- **PLASTIC BOTTLES & JUGS:** Empty and rinse. Replace the cap.

What is the China National Sword Policy?

China announced its Nation Sword Policy in 2017 which established quality standards on its imports of recyclables and banned outright, many materials liked mixed paper and mixed plastics. The global recycling economy has been affected by this policy because China was a major buyer of recyclables coming from the U.S. and other countries. As a result, there is less ability to recycle certain items, specifically lower grade plastic. Recycling plants only want materials that have value and that have end markets.

Why did the recycling rules change?

The rules for recycling have not changed that much, instead, the rules have been clarified. Now that there is more education on the proper way to recycle, residents who were doing it wrong think that recycling has been restricted. But the only material that has been impacted is plastic. There are fewer end markets for mixed plastic and the price has plummeted. Now bottles and jugs are the only plastics that recyclers want. Recycling rules change over time due to the availability of end markets. Economics of recycling are rarely discussed but are at the center of the issue of recyclability.

Why can't I recycle more things in my recycling container?

There are limits to recycling. The sortation technology at the recycling plants is not designed to recycle everything and neither are the global recycling markets. The five core items listed above comprise the core materials that facilities can sort and market at this time.

What is recycling contamination?

Recycling contamination occurs when people put trash or other items in their recycling that don't belong there. This includes things hazardous to employees like batteries, syringes, propane tanks and scrap metal. This also includes things that tangle in the sortation equipment like clothing, plastic bags, rubber hoses and hangers. And finally, this includes things that cannot be sorted or marketed like shredded paper and many plastics. This contamination has to be removed then landfilled at a very high cost. This cost will eventually be passed onto the customers.

Are recycling rules different from community to community?

No, while recycling collection methods can vary from community to community, the types of things that can and cannot be recycled are the same across Cuyahoga County and northeast Ohio. Recycling information posted on community websites and even waste hauler websites is not always the most up to date information. Please refer to CuyahogaRecycles.org for the most up to date information.



Seattle recycles more than we do, why?

Actually, the west coast has been most affected by the China restrictions and recyclables that cannot be sold are being landfilled. That is not happening here to the best of our knowledge. The Midwest has been impacted less than other parts of the country but communities all across the country are being affected. New markets will develop but it will take time. For now, it is more important than ever to support our recyclers by setting the correct items out for recycling. Other items may be recycled elsewhere, visit CuyahogaRecycles.org to learn about all your recycling options. [Note: Shaker residents may also use ShakeRecycles (bit.ly/shrecycles) to get information about how to recycle specific items.]

MATERIAL SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Plastic

“My waste hauler says I can recycle 1-7 plastics but the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste District says the only plastics I should recycle are bottles and jugs. Why is the County trying to limit recycling?”

China stopped accepting mixed plastics for recycling this year and they were the biggest consumer of plastic. While your recycler may still have a domestic market for some mixed plastic, it has very little value and there is no guarantee it will get recycled at this time. Plastics bottles and jugs are still accepted and have markets. Until new markets can be developed, focus on recycling bottles and jugs only. Other types of plastics like yogurt cups should not be included in your recycling at this time.

“Why do plastics have numbers inside recycling symbols if they’re not recyclable?”

The numbers on plastic containers are resin codes used by the plastics industry to identify the type of chemicals used to make the container. The codes do not always mean that the item is recyclable. Instead of looking at the numbers, look at the shape. If it's shaped like a bottle or jug with a neck that is narrower than the body, it can go in your recycling.

“What plastics CAN I recycle?”

Recycle plastic bottles and jugs. This includes items like water and soda bottles, shampoo bottles, milk, water and juice jugs, laundry detergent jugs and bleach bottles. Bottles and jugs should be emptied and rinsed. Replace the cap. Please support recycling by not putting other types of plastic into your recycling container. If you do, it will likely have to be sorted out as trash. This includes yogurt cups, takeout containers, berry and produce containers, etc.

“Do I need to take the pump from lotion or soap out of the bottle?”

Leave the pump and the lid on the bottle. Place the empty bottle in recycling.

Plastic Bags

“Why can’t I recycle plastic bags?”

Plastic bags placed in the recycling container will wind around the sortation equipment at the recycling plant and are difficult and dangerous to remove. Instead, recycle plastic bags separately from your mixed recycling. Take them to a retail store or grocery store that has a separate recycling program for plastic bags. Better yet, skip the plastic and use reusable bags.

“My city has a blue bag program so I have to use plastic bags to set out my recycling, what gives?”

Until an alternative collection method can be implemented, still use blue bags to contain your recyclables but do not put any other plastic film or bags in your recycling.



Shredded Paper

"Why can't I put my shredded paper into my recycling and what should I do instead?"

Shredded paper is too fine to sort out at the recycling plant and will contaminate the other materials. Instead recycle shredded paper in a paper-only drop-off bin (those green and yellow River Valley Paper or Paper Retriever bins located at schools and churches).

Glass

"I have some old picture frame glass and a glass bowl that I would like to recycle. Can this be done in Cuyahoga County?"

Recycle glass food and beverage bottles and jars only. Other glass objects or ceramics like coffee cups should not be recycled. They may have different chemical properties that will harm the recycling process.

Bottle Caps

"Can bottle caps be recycled?"

Caps and lids should be either screwed back on the container tightly before recycling or thrown out in the trash. Loose caps and lids are usually too small to be sorted out at the recycling plant and will contaminate other materials.

Aerosol Cans

"Can whipped cream cans be recycled? What about empty compressed air/gas spray cans like Lysol cans, and are the plastic lids recyclable?"

Do not put aerosol cans in your recycling, the pressurized cans may burst open and injure workers.

Pizza Boxes

"Can I recycle my pizza box?"

If it's covered in food and grease, place it in the trash. Or, tear off the parts that are clean and place them in recycling. Paper plates also belong in the trash after being used.

Cereal Boxes, Soda Boxes, Toilet Paper Rolls

"Do I recycle cereal boxes, pop boxes and toilet paper rolls? I heard things that we used to be able to recycle we can't now, I would like to know what is to be recycled or not."

Boxes that hold dry food like cereal, mac and cheese and crackers can be recycled. Remove the wax liner first. Recycle empty tissue boxes and rolls from toilet paper and paper towels can be recycled.

Frozen Food Boxes

"I know that milk and juice cartons can be included, but now I hear that frozen food boxes can't be recycled. Why? Aren't they the same?"

Refrigerated cartons are made of many fiber layers that can be peeled apart and recycled. Freezer boxes are paper coated with a layer of plastic to keep condensation off of the food. The plastic coating cannot be removed from the paper in the recycling (pulp) process. Freezer food boxes and accompanying bags, films, liners or trays go in the trash. Frozen food boxes have never been an acceptable item for recycling.

Cups (Paper and Plastic)

"If I can't use plastic cups, then I'll just switch to paper."

That's great, but the paper cup also belongs in the trash. It's coated with plastic, which can't be separated from the fiber. Plastic cups go in the trash too.