

ISSUE BRIEF

Single Stream Recycling

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What is Single-Stream Recycling?

Single-stream recycling allows consumers to place all their recyclable materials into a single recycling bin rather than separating them into multiple bins. From there, the commingled materials are delivered to a materials recovery facility (MRF) where they can be processed into separate commodities.

Advantages of Single-Stream Recycling

- **Less effort for the public.** Because single stream allows the public to place all recyclable materials into a single container for subsequent sorting, it is simpler and promotes greater participation.
- **Reduced collection costs.** Collection represents a significant portion of the overall recycling costs. By commingling the material, collection can be done with a single-compartment truck and not be required to discharge the load on a multi-compartmented vehicle based on the first filled compartment. Conversely, if multiple trucks are used for recyclables collection, the number of total vehicles or routes necessary will be reduced.
- **Improved efficiency.** Single stream recycling generally allows for an easier transition to automated collection leading to greater efficiency and improved safety.
- **Greater flexibility.** Single stream recycling provides opportunities to add more products to the recycling container or even add another container for separate processing, like food waste collection.

Disadvantages of Single-Stream Recycling

- **Increased processing costs.** Because material is further commingled, the effort to separate them is greater requiring more equipment and costs.
- **Increased contamination.** Because more materials are in the mix, there is a greater chance that material could be contaminated or cross-contaminated. In addition, with a greater number of materials, the public may engage in wishful recycling and optimistically try to recycle materials that cannot be segregated and sold.

Education is Key

A successful recycling program requires continuous education, feedback and reinforcement. There are numerous materials that cause confusion. In general, most programs have certain materials that are commonly accepted and some that are not accepted. Nonetheless, every program has a slightly different list, so it is best to check with the local municipality for what is accepted.

Know Before You Throw

MOST COMMONLY ACCEPTED MATERIALS

Newspapers
Cardboard
Plastic bottles
Cans
Office paper
Magazines and junk mail

MOST COMMONLY MISTAKEN MATERIALS

Plastic bags - empty
Plastic bags - full
Tanglers
Paper cups
Pouches

For More Information:

Anne Germain
NWRA Vice President of Technical
and Regulatory Affairs
202-364-3724
agermain@wasterecycling.org

Contact Us



@wasterecycling
wasterecycling.org • 202-244-4700 • info@wasterecycling.org
1550 Crystal Drive, Suite 804 Arlington, VA 22202