



# RECYCLE IT

From your home to the recycling facility,  
make sure your waste ends up in the **RIGHT** place

# RIGHT

# SORTING OUT A

# BIG PROBLEM

**Updated quality standards mean Sacramento-area residents have to clean up their act**

BY COREY RODDA

**W**e've all been taught the importance of recycling, and Sacramento area residents are doing an excellent job of filling their recycling carts.

But a simple mistake could end up sabotaging recycling efforts for everyone.

When the wrong items are put in the recycling cart, it's called contamination. When recycling materials become contaminated, every recyclable that you devoted time to sorting and cleaning is at risk of ending up in a landfill. Once an aluminum can touches a greasy pizza box in a recycling cart, the hopes that it will become a new recycled aluminum can are greatly diminished.

Many of our country's recyclables are shipped overseas to China, which has been accepting high levels of contamination. However on March 1, 2018, enforcement of international policies will limit contamination drastically to just 0.5 percent or less. This means every bale of recyclables that is received in China must consist of no more than 0.5 percent contamination. This change is just one of many anti-pollution reforms.

Locally, contamination levels of residential recycling exceed those levels that are accepted in China. If there is no market willing to buy these recyclable materials, they could end up in landfills.

As local markets adapt to these global expectations, recycling processors will demand cleaner recyclables from cities and counties. If the recycling processors are tasked with cleaning highly contaminated recyclables to ship to international markets, they will have to decide how best to pass along those processing costs.

## *RECYCLING PROCESSORS WILL DEMAND CLEANER RECYCLABLES FROM CITIES AND COUNTIES.*

Alex Oseguera, vice president and general manager of Waste Management in the California/Nevada region, noted that Waste Management is focused on doing outreach to reduce recycling contamination.

"When in doubt, throw it into the trash," he said. "If you put contaminants into the recycling carts, you might spoil what others have done a good job of doing and even create safety hazards for our employees if what you are placing in the recycling cart is hazardous."



## **WHAT IS CONTAMINATION?**

**WHEN SOMEONE THROWS SOMETHING THAT IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE MATERIAL INTO THE RECYCLING CART.**

**LOOK FOR 5 TIPS THROUGHOUT THIS PUBLICATION FOR WAYS YOU CAN HELP REDUCE CONTAMINATION AND RECYCLE RIGHT!**

Bales of sorted material at the Sacramento Recycling and Transfer Station await being transported for recycling.  
PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

## Make recycling a good habit with these room-by-room tips

BY ANNE STOKES

# STARTING AT HOME

### BATHROOM

- Leave a recycling bin under the sink for **shampoo bottles, toilet paper rolls** and more.

### KITCHEN

- Keep a bin next to your garbage for **recyclables**, which will make separating them convenient.
- Save and **reuse to-go containers**.
- Find **creative recipes** to use viable food scraps, such as making stock with vegetable odds and ends.

### OTHER HELPFUL HINTS:

- How do you keep recyclable materials clean? A **quick rinse** is enough to clean them off before throwing them in the recycling cart — there's no need to put them in the dishwasher.
- Anything with **more than one material type** cannot be recycled locally, such as juice boxes that contain foil and wax-coated paper.
- When shopping, purchase items labeled "**post-consumer recycled**" and head to second-hand stores to find used treasures.
- Set a **good example for kids** by making proper recycling a household habit. Explain to kids how recycling not only keeps waste out of landfills, it saves resources and energy by using existing materials.

### LIVING ROOM

- Keep a recycling bin for **paper products** like old newspapers, magazines and junk mail.

### BEDROOM

- Don't let things like clothing, books and toys build up. Make regular trips to **donation centers**, not just during your annual spring cleaning, so these items can be put to good use.

### OUTSIDE

- Try **backyard composting!** Take yard trimmings, leaves and food scraps and put it to good use in your garden.
- Keep two bins in the garage: One for HHW items like **batteries and the other for recyclables**.

TIP  
# 1

## NO FOOD IN THE RECYCLING CART!

Throwing used food containers in the recycling cart may come from the best of intentions, but it may do more harm than good. While paper items such as pizza boxes, to-go containers, napkins and paper plates are recyclable at first, **leftover food, grease, oil or liquids can contaminate the recycling stream.**

It's recyclable when it's clean, but once it's dirty, it's garbage.

Residents could potentially ruin everything else that's in that cart by introducing food residue. Once it gets emptied into the recycling truck, clean materials already in the truck could be ruined.

Many recyclable materials are shipped to facilities as far away as China, so it could be months before they're processed (imagine the mold on a cheesy pizza box that's been left out for a month). Even just a little bit of food can still contaminate whole loads of recyclables.

**FOOD-SOILED CONTAINERS BELONG IN THE TRASH, NOT THE RECYCLING CART! DIRTY TO-GO CONTAINERS, PIZZA BOXES, PAPER PLATES AND NAPKINS ALSO GO IN THE TRASH.**



A

# DANGEROUS

## JOB

### Improper disposal of trash can pose a safety concern for workers

BY COREY RODDA

Each week, garbage day brings the promise of a cleaner, less cluttered home. But when hazardous materials make their way into our garbage, public safety and the well-being of sanitation workers are at risk.

Everyday household products that contain hazardous materials are capable of sparking a fire in the bed of a garbage or recycling truck, according to Dan Ward, Waste Operations Supervisor for Sacramento County Waste Management and Recycling. Ward points out that hazardous materials have caused county recycling loads to occasionally catch on fire.

If the bed of a recycling truck is on fire, drivers must go directly to designated locations on their route to dump the flaming waste — a safe distance from buildings, dry grass and fields.

“There are times when customers’ carts have just melted down to the ground before we even service them,” Ward says, adding that this occurs mainly due to hot ashes or coals.

How to avoid these fires?

Residents should check with their waste-disposal service to determine what items are safe to put in the



David Kilson, Senior Collection Equipment Operator with Sacramento County, had to empty his truck's load after it caught fire.  
PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

recycling cart and if other precautions need to be taken (see the back page for a list of resources for local cities and counties).

In general, lightbulbs, cellphone batteries, wood varnish, paint and some of the stronger household cleaners should not be recycled curbside but brought to a household hazardous waste (HHW) collection facility.

In addition to posing a threat to public safety, placing hazardous materials in your recycling bin can lead to an increase in disposal costs.

“If you throw a hazardous material in with your recyclables, it increases processing costs,” said Ken Pereira, Supervising Waste Management Specialist for Sacramento County Department of Waste Management & Recycling. “The items have to be removed and at an increased cost to workers. Respirators must be used to extract broken fluorescent bulbs from the recyclables.”

Pereira also noted that lightbulbs and batteries contain low levels of mercury and other hazardous materials, so when sizable quantities are deposited in a landfill, the environment is endangered.

**“THERE ARE TIMES WHEN CUSTOMERS’ CARTS HAVE JUST MELTED DOWN TO THE GROUND BEFORE WE EVEN SERVICE THEM.”**

**Dan Ward**

Waste operations supervisor, Sacramento County Department of Waste Management & Recycling

“Despite how well we engineer a landfill, that material could make it out of the landfill footprint and into the environment,” he said.

Besides the fact that it’s against the law to throw away batteries, medical sharps and fluorescent bulbs, those items also pose a danger to sanitation workers, who have been punctured by sharps and exposed to harmful materials in light bulbs.

“Anything sharp that pokes a worker can cause fear and stress in their life,” Pereira said, “and the cost to responding to that incident can drive up recycling costs.”

TIP  
#2

## BATTERIES ARE HAZARDOUS WASTE (HHW)!

Batteries power some of our favorite things: toys, remote controls, laptops and more. As useful as they are, they can pose hazardous risks if disposed of incorrectly. Lithium ion batteries, such as those used in laptops and cell phones, have been known to ignite fires in garbage trucks and processing facilities. Household

batteries (AA, 9-volt) contain a toxic mix of cadmium, cobalt and iron that can leach into soil and groundwater.

**It is illegal to throw batteries away in the trash!** Many retail establishments offer battery take-back programs and some waste haulers even pick them up curbside free of charge.

Batteries aren’t the only Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) that pose safety and environmental risks — used motor oil and filters, paint, medical sharps and CFL light bulbs can pollute soil and watersheds and pose a significant safety risk to sanitation workers.



**HHW DOES NOT GO IN RECYCLING! IT NEEDS TO BE TAKEN TO AN HHW FACILITY OR TO A RETAIL TAKE-BACK LOCATION. VISIT YOUR CITY/COUNTY WEBSITE ON THE BACK PAGE FOR HHW FACILITY OPTIONS.**

# MEET THE SORTERS

Keep them safe by recycling right

BY ANNE STOKES



District Manager Angel Diaz and Supervisor Maria Parra are just two individuals who come into contact with your recyclables at the Sacramento Recycling and Transfer Station.

PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF

**J**ust toss it in your recycling cart. Everything that ends up there gets recycled, right?

*Wrong. Very wrong.*

While recycling is inarguably a good practice, there is a *right* way to do it. Recycling the wrong way can cause big problems. That's because once they're picked up and taken away from your home, recyclables are hand-sorted by line workers who make sure the right materials get recycled and the wrong materials are removed and sent to the landfill.

"There are actual people who are going through the recycling materials to extract non-recyclables," said Angel Diaz, Sacramento Recycling District Manager. "From time to time, we have very hazardous materials come across the line."

While Waste Management's transfer station is equipped to handle all sorts of household recycling materials, including glass bottles, plastic milk jugs, and aluminum and tin cans, it is not designed to process hazardous waste and materials, such as steel, lumber, diapers, needles, dead animals and electronics that end up in the blue bin. Not only can such materials risk damaging the equipment and shut down the facility, but they can also pose safety risks to workers.

Single-use plastic bags and clothing are the most common causes of equipment jams. The only way to clear them is to stop the line, climb into the machinery and cut the offending material out. Such down time for the plant means increased processing costs.

Fire is another facility risk, as some hazardous materials like batteries and used propane containers can

**"IT'S DANGEROUS  
FOR THE PEOPLE  
WHO ARE SORTING  
ON THE LINE."**

**Maria Parra**

MRF Supervisor, Waste Management

cause explosions and set fire to combustible paper and plastic materials.

After 13 years of working in waste services, Maria Parra has seen it all — and lots of it. Currently a sort line supervisor, she hopes that the public will be more aware of what they put in their blue bins once they understand where it ends up.

"It's hard for us to pull those things out of the line and it's dangerous for the people who are sorting on the line," she said.

While it's dirty and sometimes dangerous work, Diaz said the job they do is important.

"California is all about recycling, renewable energy and turning [materials] into something that's usable again," he said. "I feel great about what we do for our community."

**TIP  
#3**

## REDUCE AND REUSE THOSE BAGS!

Since California enacted its single-use plastic bag ban in 2016, the number of plastic bags showing up at processing plants has decreased. That's good because film plastics can pose an operational risk for recycling facilities. **Dry cleaning bags, plastic food wrap and even old supermarket bags can get caught up in machinery and force the entire plant to shut down** for up to an hour while sanitation workers climb into dangerous equipment to remove the material.

The best option is to keep loose plastic bags out of the recycling stream in the first place. Use inexpensive reusable bags when shopping. Many supermarkets, retail stores and recycling facilities also accept used plastic bags for recycling in-store.



**CHECK WITH YOUR LOCAL RETAILER  
TO SEE IF THEY ACCEPT PLASTIC  
BAGS FOR RECYCLING.**

TIP  
#4

## DONATE OLD CLOTHES!

Clothing and textiles make up more than **21 billion pounds** of waste a year in the U.S., only 15 percent of which is donated or recycled. That means approximately **70 pounds of clothing per person** takes up space in our nation's landfills each year, creating greenhouse gasses when it decomposes.

Considering the prevalence of second-hand retail options, as well as the *need* for usable clothing locally and abroad, donating your unwanted jeans, shirts and jackets to nonprofit organizations or selling them to a recycled fashion store just makes good sense. You can also repurpose clothing and textiles into new items — get inspired with DIY projects via Pinterest, or put old towels to use in your rag bin!

If your used clothing is ruined or no longer wearable, throw it away in the trash, not your recycling bin. Textiles can damage equipment, shut down processing facilities and force sanitation workers into risky areas to remove torn-up cloth.

**UNUSABLE CLOTHING SHOULD BE THROWN IN THE TRASH. DONATE UNWANTED CLOTHING AT A DROP-OFF KIOSK OR DONATION CENTER. CHECK ONLINE FOR LOCATIONS.**



# CLOSING THE LOOP

## Why should we recycle?

**IT TAKES 90% LESS ENERGY TO RECYCLE AN ALUMINUM CAN VS. MAKING A BRAND NEW ONE.**



### Natural Resources

Recycling saves natural resources. Every ton of paper that gets recycled can save 17 trees, 7,000 gallons of water, and 380 gallons of oil. It takes 90 percent less resources to make a new aluminum can from an old one. Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a television for three hours.



### Environment

When you don't throw away waste in its proper place it can have a devastating impact on the environment. Chemicals known to cause health problems can be released into the air, soil and water.



### Landfill Space

Landfills have a limited amount of space and it can be expensive to create new landfills. At current waste disposal rates, the County of Sacramento's Kiefer Landfill has approximately 5 years of constructed refuse capacity remaining and decades of permitted capacity. However if waste disposal rates increase substantially due to contamination of recyclable materials, the capacity will be exhausted sooner and disposal costs will increase.



### Laws

There are laws that require cities and counties to reduce waste and recycle. The current goal is to reduce, reuse and recycle 75 percent of waste away from landfills by 2020. Household batteries, fluorescent lamps and tubes, and other hazardous waste is banned from landfills.



### Costs

Recyclables can generate revenue to help offset collection costs for cities and counties. Items that end up in the garbage don't get sorted and cost millions of dollars to dispose of in landfills.

## What makes something recyclable?

"Something is recyclable if there is a market to turn that item into something new," said Doug Huston, Recycling Coordinator with the City of Sacramento. Materials such as paper and cardboard, plastic, metal and glass are accepted in curbside programs, but there are guidelines and exceptions depending on the local market.

For instance, products made from multiple layers of cardboard, plastic and foil (such as juice boxes, soy milk and pet food bags) are not accepted

in our region. Keeping recyclables clean is key. For example, metal cans and glass jars should be given a quick rinse before they are tossed in so their contents don't contaminate the rest of the recycling cart.

"The code number on plastics does not necessarily mean it can be recycled. It is a way to identify the resin or plastic type," Huston said. "Polystyrene (styrofoam) has the number six but it should be tossed in the garbage."



### WHAT GOES IN MY RECYCLING CART?

**CARDBOARD BOXES  
PLASTIC CONTAINERS  
CLEAN PAPER  
GLASS CONTAINERS  
METAL CANS**

**ITEMS ACCEPTED  
IN EVERY  
CITY/COUNTY  
RECYCLING CART**

*Make sure it's clean! Give containers a quick rinse.*

City of Sacramento's recycling cart  
PHOTO COURTESY CITY OF SACRAMENTO

# WHERE WE DON'T WANT RECYCLABLES:

# THE LANDFILL

BY COREY RODDA

Until recently, China purchased a large percentage of California's recyclables in order to meet international manufacturing needs, according to Mark Rappaport, Environmental Specialist Supervisor for the City of Folsom.

Recycling processors in the United States have made money sorting and cleaning recyclables that they buy from municipalities before shipping them overseas.

But stricter rules on the quality of recyclable materials could throw a wrench into California's recycling infrastructure and its goal to recycle 75 percent of all waste by 2020.

Beginning March 1, 2018, China will raise its standards for the cleanliness of recycled items purchased from other countries. Under the new policy it will only accept recyclable material that has no more than a 0.5 percent level of contamination, which is small compared to contamination levels of 10 percent for bales being sent to China before the policy.

Because of this change, U.S.-based recycling processors will be paying higher operational costs to clean and sort recyclables. Sacramento area processors likely will be working overtime to achieve the new threshold.

"They might have to modify their processing regimen to remove more contaminants," said Rappaport.

"Most of the processors have people pulling out contaminants from conveyor belts and the speed of the conveyor belts determines the thoroughness of the sort," he added. "Depending on the contamination of the recycling, they might have to slow down their belts and hire more people to sort the recyclables. These changes will cost them more money."

Rappaport said the processors also are being hurt by a decreasing price for recyclables, which could result in some of them closing up shop. If this happens, municipalities would have to absorb the cost of landfilling more recyclables.

"Our cost to bury material in a landfill is \$30 a ton," said Keith Goodrich, Division Chief for Sacramento County Department of Waste Management & Recycling. "We are in a very volatile time. The value of recyclable materials historically has lowered the overall costs to ratepayers. Contaminated recyclables result in lower value materials and more disposal, and will ultimately lead to higher costs for ratepayers."

*"THE VALUE OF RECYCLABLE MATERIALS HISTORICALLY HAS LOWERED THE OVERALL COSTS TO RATEPAYERS. CONTAMINATED RECYCLABLES RESULT IN LOWER VALUE MATERIALS AND MORE DISPOSAL, AND WILL ULTIMATELY LEAD TO HIGHER COSTS FOR RATEPAYERS."*

**Keith Goodrich**

Division Chief, Sacramento County Department of Waste Management & Recycling

TIP  
#5

## USE YOUR GREEN WASTE CART!

Green waste takes up valuable (and limited) space in landfills and is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, so keep it out of the garbage.

"You're saving organic matter from going to a landfill and turning it into compost that's used by local farmers to grow our food," said Steve Harriman, Public Works Division Manager, City of Rancho Cordova.

### Accepted in green waste cart:

- ✓ Yard trimmings
- ✓ Leaves
- ✓ Tree branches
- ✓ Wood chips

### Not accepted in green waste cart:

- ✗ Food
- ✗ Animal waste
- ✗ Garden items (such as hoses, pesticides and tools)
- ✗ Rocks
- ✗ Dirt and soil
- ✗ Painted or treated wood



**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ACCEPTABLE AND NON-ACCEPTABLE ITEMS, CHECK YOUR LOCAL CITY/COUNTY WEBSITE LISTED ON THE BACK PAGE.**

# KEEP OUR RECYCLING

# CLEAN



Sacramento-area recycling carts are being contaminated with food residue, plastic bags, hazardous materials and other trash — things that don't belong there. If recyclables don't get "cleaner," they may have to go to the landfill. Not only is that harmful to the environment, it could increase waste management costs for residents. The solution to this problem is simple — and it starts with you. Find out what can and can't be recycled in your recycling cart.

**The future of California's recycling depends on you!**



## RESOURCES TO HELP YOU RECYCLE RIGHT

### CITY/COUNTY RESOURCES

**Citrus Heights:** [www.citrusheights.net/279](http://www.citrusheights.net/279)

**Elk Grove:** [www.elkgrovecity.org/recycle](http://www.elkgrovecity.org/recycle)

**Folsom:** [www.folsom.ca.us/smartcart](http://www.folsom.ca.us/smartcart)

**Galt:** [www.cal-waste.com/residential-services/galt-residential-service](http://www.cal-waste.com/residential-services/galt-residential-service)

**Rancho Cordova:** [www.ranchorecycles.com](http://www.ranchorecycles.com)

**Sacramento City:** [www.sacreecycle.org](http://www.sacreecycle.org)

**Sacramento County:**  
[www.sacgreenteam.com](http://www.sacgreenteam.com)

### WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

**Waste Management Waste and Recycling Services:**  
[www.sacramentovalley.wm.com](http://www.sacramentovalley.wm.com)

**Cal-Waste Recovery Systems:**  
[www.cal-waste.com](http://www.cal-waste.com)

**Republic Services Recycling & Waste Solutions:** [www.republicservices.com](http://www.republicservices.com)

### WASTE WIZARD

Online tool to learn how to dispose of any item the right way

**Sacramento:** [www.cityofsacramento.org/Public-Works/RSW/waste-wizard](http://www.cityofsacramento.org/Public-Works/RSW/waste-wizard)

**Elk grove:** [www.elkgrovecity.org/recycle](http://www.elkgrovecity.org/recycle)

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