



Recycling Contamination: What it Means and What You Can do to Minimize it!



In 2014, the United States generated approximately 258 million tons of municipal solid waste¹. With a residential recycling rate of 15.3%², Michigan ranks last amongst the Great Lakes States and ranks behind most of the country³. In order to reduce the amount of waste headed towards landfills, communities are turning more and more towards recycling programs and waste prevention techniques. Recycling involves determining what type of material you have (e.g. plastic, metal etc...), and placing the clean item in a bin that separates waste from recyclable materials according to your recycling programs requirements. Containers can be single stream (all recyclables placed in same bins) or dual stream (fiber materials separated from plastics, metals and glass). Recycled materials are sent off to be broken down and re-made into “new items”. Contaminated materials and bins are either sent to the landfill or not accepted.

RECYCLING CONTAMINATION

Not all materials can be recycled, while other materials need to be cleaned prior to disposal. Recycling contamination occurs when materials that are not recyclable are placed in a bin with recyclable materials, recyclables are not sorted properly or are dirty (e.g. greasy, contains food waste etc....). Contamination can occur due to recycling not being a priority, laziness, not knowing how to recycle/what is accepted, changes to what is accepted, changes to packages, over zealotness and by accident. Paper plates and cups often contain a waxy coating that the user may not know about, and that shouldn't be recycled. Recycling programs vary across the county, state and country, new residents and visitors may not be familiar with local recycling practices.

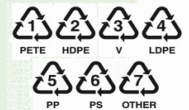
PIZZA BOXES

Greasy pizza boxes are not accepted by recycling facilities. The residues remain in the post recycled “paper pulp” material destined for paper products. Products made from this pulp can have its integrity compromised due from having holes, thin spots and oil splotches”. However, in some cases, you can cut out the greasy spots!



PLASTICS

- There are seven categories of plastic, with numbers indicating plastic resin type
- Not always clearly labelled
- Can take 450+ years to breakdown
- Not all categories of plastics are accepted for recycling
- Styrofoam is a separate category of recycling and should not be placed with plastic unless specified



WHY RECYCLING CONTAMINATION IS A BAD THING

Recycled materials can be worth a lot of money, even more when materials are uncontaminated! Over \$435 million of recyclables end up in the landfill³, that otherwise could be up-cycled or revenue for businesses. There is a market for recyclable materials both domestically and abroad, and contamination can decrease the market value to the point it being sent to the landfill. Contamination also has international repercussions. China is the biggest importer of U.S. recyclables, they recently lowered the threshold of accepted recycling contamination from 1.5% to 0.3 to 0.5%, making it harder for recyclers to move their products and leading to less profit, loss of jobs and possibly a reduction in services for residents. For more information, please contact Dr. Shikha Singh at the Jackson County Conservation District via email at shikha.singh@macd.org or by phone (517) 395 - 2089.

Sources:

1. E.P.A. 2018. Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: Facts and Figures. Date Accessed: February 14, 2018. (<https://www.epa.gov/smm/advancing-sustainable-materials-management-facts-and-figures>)
2. D.E.Q. 2016. Final Report: Measuring Recycling in the State of Michigan: 2014 Recycling Rate (prepared by RRS). Date Accessed: March 12, 2018. (https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-wmrdp-recycling-measurementupdate_553223_7.pdf)
3. D.E.Q. Yr not known. Recycling FAQs. Date Accessed: March 12, 2018. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/Michigan_Recycling_FAQs_453439_7.pdf



This checklist is printed on paper manufactured from 100% bagasse (recycled sugarcane waste fiber), a by-product of sugar cane !