

9 TIPS FOR BETTER RECYCLING



by Ted Grabowski

Participation in our community or office recycling program is a simple and painless way to help sustain a better and brighter future. However, some common mistakes can make these efforts less effective, less efficient, and more costly for our company or community.

Our national recycling efforts have resulted in some impressive results. Consider these recent estimated recycling rates for some common materials from several online sources:

- Cardboard: 71-76%
- Paper: 65-69%
- Aluminum beer and soft drink cans: 50%
- Glass containers, such as beer, liquor, and soft drinks: 39%
- PET & HPDE bottles: 29%



As impressive as some of these rates are, we can always improve. Here are nine simple tips how:

1

Reduce use first: Using fewer materials is a good first step which reduces the volume of material that needs to be recycled. For example, combining on-line orders reduce the number of shipments and boxes. Buying goods and drinks in bulk will save money and reduce material use. Packing lunches from home instead of take-out orders limits the use of plastic and foam containers. Using electronic filing systems and double-sided printing can reduce the use of office paper. Some printer manufacturers recycle printer cartridges that are returned by customers, thereby reducing the use of virgin plastics.

2

Reuse whenever possible: Many materials can be reused before recycling. Common examples include grocery store bags used as trash can liners, plastic restaurant containers used as household organizers, and water bottles which can be refilled at home. Old books can be donated to organizations in your local community. Reuse gift bags, boxes and wrapping paper, which frequently cannot be recycled due to their laminated finishes. A quick Google search can identify a myriad of other useful ways to reuse common household items.

3

Follow the rules. Recycling centers use different methods to separate, sort and process incoming materials. Centers function more efficiently if we follow their specific recommendations. For example, some centers prefer that plastic bottle caps be removed, while others prefer they remain in place. Some centers prefer that aluminum cans not be crushed, while others have no preference. In general, any item selected for recycling should be clean, empty, and dry. Food remnants should be removed to control rodents and prevent contamination.



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4 Use the right pick-up containers. One of the most time consuming and expensive steps in any recycling program is collection and transportation. Many communities require the use of specific containers and may require all cardboard boxes be flattened to save space. Some use color-coded tubs or specifically designed and covered recycle bins. These restrictions help collectors quickly distinguish trash from recyclables and, in some cases, allow pre-sorting materials on the truck during pick-up. In addition, collection services may use trucks and loaders designed only for the special containers they provide and may reject containers that are not properly placed along the curb. Unless specifically permitted, never use large plastic bags to accumulate recycle materials.

5 Learn what can be recycled. Since most recycling centers are designed for a specific range of materials, many types of plastics, metals and paper cannot be processed. Examples include plastic films and clear wraps, plastic straws, certain grades of plastic, foam packaging, and certain metals. Many experts suggest never recycling anything smaller than a credit card, since small items, such as loose bottle caps, can frequently jam sorting equipment. Your local community recycling center can provide specific information on exactly what can and cannot be recycled.

6 Learn what is prohibited. Many common household items can seriously impact the safe and effective processing of materials in your community recycling center. Few centers can process spent batteries, hazardous materials such as paint or solvents, and food. Normally, the first process at your recycling center involves hand screening to remove materials that can interfere with or contaminate the process. Wet paper may be rejected and can result in rejecting otherwise useful materials.

7 Don't be an "aspirational recycler." Normally the most valuable and easy-to-process recyclables are the most common materials we use. Plastic and glass bottles, aluminum cans and common newspapers and cardboard are good examples. When mixed with non-recyclable materials such as plastic film or bubble-wrap, centers may reject entire loads of mixed materials. This wastes the load and results in increased disposal costs. A good rule-of-thumb is, "when in doubt...throw it out."



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8 Stay abreast of changing guidelines. The processes used at your local recycling center are subject to change over time. New methods are being developed that can minimize sorting costs while others are being designed to accept a wider range of plastics for recycling. Your community coordinator will send out new guidelines when this occurs. Stay abreast of your current rules to maximize the value of your recycling effort and minimize your community's disposal costs.

9 Recycle securely: Unfortunately, our recycling efforts can also create an opportunity for unscrupulous actors to gain valuable personal or business information that can be used to commit fraud. Be careful about business or personal information that may appear in recycle bins, especially paper. Never recycle old bank statements, credit card solicitations and bills, utility bills, tax statements or other sensitive information. Promptly shred all documents that contain personal or confidential information before disposal or recycling. Recycle electronics using special collection centers or services such as CompuCycle in Houston. Delete all files and wipe all hard drives before recycling.

USING THESE TIPS CAN IMPROVE OUR RECYCLING EFFORTS, REDUCE THE PRODUCTION OF RAW MATERIALS, AND INCREASE OUR RECYCLING RATES, ALL WHILE REDUCING DISPOSAL COSTS.

