

Recycling 101

Recent news about recycling have a lot of people wondering if recycling actually works. Here in the Twin Cities, you can be assured the recycling you put in your cart is getting recycled as long as the materials are accepted in your program and prepared properly. Minnesota state law requires this. There continues to be a demand for our recycled materials, and recyclers continue to invest in new technology to make recycling more advanced and efficient. The best ways to support recycling are to refresh your knowledge of what can be recycled, only recycle items that are accepted, and keep stuff that isn't accepted out.

Do recycle

Paper

- Mail, office, and school papers
- Magazines and catalogs
- Newspapers and inserts
- Phone books



Boxes:

- Cardboard
- Cereal and cracker boxes
- Shoe boxes, gift boxes, and electronics boxes
- Toothpaste, medication, and other toiletry boxes



Cartons

- Milk cartons
- Juice boxes
- Soup, broth, and wine cartons



Glass

- Food and beverage bottles and jars



Plastic (#1, 2, 5)

Bottles and jugs:

- Water, soda, and juice bottles
- Milk and juice jugs
- Ketchup and salad dressing bottles
- Dishwashing liquid bottles and detergent jugs
- Shampoo, soap, and lotion bottles

Cups and containers:

- Yogurt, pudding, and fruit cups
- Clear disposable cups and bowls*
- Margarine, cottage cheese, and other tubs
- Produce, deli and takeout containers*

Metal

- Food and beverage cans
- Clean aluminum foil and pans



Don't recycle:

- Aerosol cans
- Batteries
- Black plastic
- Containers that held hazardous products (such as oil, paint, and pesticides)
- Glass or ceramic dishes, drinking glasses, and vases
- Gift wrap that is shiny or contains glitter or foil
- Hoses, cords, and string lights
- Large plastic items like laundry baskets, storage tubs, and toys
- Microwavable food trays
- Paper cups and plates**
- Paper soiled with food, such as pizza boxes from delivery, napkins, and paper towels**
- Plastic bags (accepted in many drop-off locations such as grocery and department stores)
- Plastic foam (Styrofoam™)
- Plastic utensils and straws
- Random metal items like pots, pipes, and hangers*
- Window glass and mirrors

* These items are recyclable in some cities. Contact your city recycling coordinator for details. Find your city recycling coordinator's contact information at hennepin.us/recycling

** These items may be accepted in organics recycling.

If you're not sure an item can be recycled, check the Green Disposal Guide at hennepin.us/green-disposal-guide or throw it in the trash.

Preparing your recycling

- Don't bag your recyclables – place them loose in your recycling cart.
- Items should be clean and empty – give them a quick rinse before recycling.
- Leave plastic caps on plastic bottles. Do not place caps in the bin on their own.
- Metal caps can be collected in a metal can – when it's full, carefully squeeze the top of the can shut and place it in your recycling.
- Remove pumps from spray bottles.
- Flatten boxes.
- Don't crush containers like milk jugs, juice cartons or cans. With modern sorting equipment, uncrushed containers are more likely to end up in the right spot.

Knowing what plastics to recycle

Plastics are confusing because of the huge variety of types and ways in which they are used. There are seven types of plastics, and packaging that is new to both consumers and recyclers is constantly showing up on store shelves.

The number you find on plastic items, often in what looks like a recycling symbol, is called the resin code. The resin code helps recyclers and consumers know what type of plastic an item is made of. It does not mean the item is recyclable, though it can help you figure it out.

In general, you can recycle plastic bottles, jugs, cups, and containers that are #1, 2, and 5 that are not black and have not held hazardous chemicals. There are strong markets to recycle these plastics into new products.

See the plastics recycling decision guide for more help in determining if a plastic item is recyclable.



Avoid wish-cycling

At some point, we've all probably put something in our recycling cart or dumpster that we weren't sure was actually recyclable. This is sometimes called "wish-cycling."

Although you may want to recycle everything, the best thing you can do to support recycling is to only recycle the items accepted in your program. These items can be sorted properly at recycling facilities and made into new products.

Next time you're questioning if something is recyclable, first check your city's accepted recycling guide. Otherwise, remember the phrase "when in doubt, throw it out."

This will help ensure that recycling facilities get items that can be recycled and minimize the amount of non-recyclable items, otherwise known as contaminants, that they receive.

Some of the items that are not accepted for recycling can damage equipment at recycling facilities, harm employees at those facilities, or do not have strong markets to be turned into new products. This is why it's important to keep these items out. The following pages include important items to keep out of the recycling and what to do with them instead.



Important items to keep out of your recycling cart (and what to do instead)

Plastic bags



Plastic bags and wrap get tangled in the equipment at recycling sorting facilities and workers spend hours each day removing them. Plastic bags and wrap can be recycled if brought back to a retail drop-off location.

Keep your plastic bags separate and bring them to collection bins at the front of stores such as Cub Foods, Goodwill, JCPenney, Lunds & Byerlys, Kohl's, Kowalski's Markets, Target, Walmart, and metro area food co-ops. Plastic bags are also accepted in the subscription recycling program by Ridwell (ridwell.com)

Many types of plastic bags are accepted, including: retail, carryout, produce, newspaper, bread, dry cleaning, plastic storage baggies, bubble wrap and air pillows (deflate), product wrapping on paper towels and bathroom tissue. Bags must be empty, clean, and dry. Learn more at plasticfilmrecycling.org.

Bags of recycling



Recycling in bags doesn't get properly sorted at the recycling facility because recyclers can't tell what's in the bag and don't have time to open and sort it. Make sure to place your recycling loose in your recycling cart.

Black plastic



Black plastic cannot be recycled, no matter what type of plastic it is. The optical sorting equipment at recycling facilities cannot identify black plastic because it absorbs

light instead of reflecting it. Additionally, black plastic has little value because it cannot be dyed to create a new color and, therefore, can be used in fewer ways. Put black plastic items of any kind in the trash.

Large plastic items



Large plastic items like laundry baskets, storage bins, lawn furniture, plastic toys, and other large plastic items can't be recycled. There are not good markets for recycling these items,

and it is not possible to sort them at recycling facilities. Purchase high-quality items, use them for as long as possible, and donate items that are in good shape when you're ready to get rid of them. Put large plastic items that are broken and not repairable in the trash.

Random metal items



Random metal items such as pots and pans, pipes, hangers, and tools can damage equipment and harm workers at recycling facilities. All metal can be recycled, just not in your recycling cart at

home. Take random metal items to a scrap metal recycler; find locations on the Green Disposal Guide at hennepin.us/greendisposalguide.

Pressurized tanks



Cylinders and tanks contain a compressed gas that makes them explosive and potential fire hazards.

It is illegal to put propane tanks, helium tanks, and other pressurized cylinders in your household recycling or trash. Properly dispose of all pressurized cylinders; find options on the Green Disposal Guide.

Single-use plastic utensils and straws



Plastic utensils and straws are too small and difficult to sort at recycling facilities, and there aren't good recycling markets for them. Avoid them by choosing reusable options or refusing them when you can.

Paper plates, cups, and takeout containers



Paper cups, plates, and takeout containers can't be recycled because they are often lined with plastic or contaminated with food. These items can be placed in the organics recycling if they are BPI

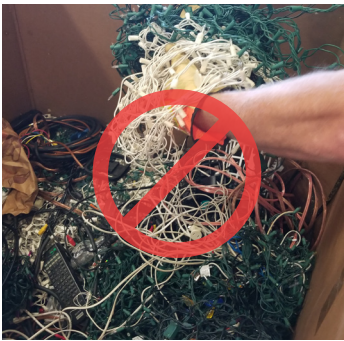
certified compostable (see organics recycling 101 to learn more). Avoid disposable containers by choosing reusable cups, mugs and plates.

Electronics and batteries



Electronics and batteries can't be sorted properly at recycling facilities, and certain batteries can cause fires at facilities. Batteries and electronics should be recycled at drop-off locations. Learn options for batteries and electronics on the Green Disposal Guide.

Cords and string lights



Keep "tangles" like cords, hoses and string lights out of your recycling bin. As the name suggests, these items get tangled in the equipment at recycling facilities. You can recycle cords and string lights at Hennepin County drop-off facilities. Learn more on the Green Disposal Guide.

Needles and sharps



Needles and sharps should be managed and disposed of safely to prevent injury and disease transmission from needle-sticks. They should never be placed in your

recycling cart. Learn about disposal options on the Green Disposal Guide.

Small items

Anything smaller than the size of your fist will not go through the recycling process well. Small items fall through the cracks of the sorting process and can end up contaminating other recycling streams, especially glass.

What happens to your recycling

Recycling starts at the curb with you separating your recyclables from trash so they can be picked up by your hauler.

The next step is processing. Haulers bring the recyclables to material recovery facilities (MRFs) to be sorted, graded, cleaned, and prepared for markets. Materials are sorted to remove contaminants that may damage processing equipment and graded to reclaim higher-value materials.

Various methods are used at MRFs to sort materials. Mechanical processes such as magnets, air jets, and screens use physical differences among materials, such as weight or magnetism, to sort them. Hand-sorting is used to sort materials that the mechanical methods cannot.

After the recyclables are processed at the MRF, the materials are sold to manufacturers that make them into a wide variety of new products. Paper is turned into a pulp and recycled back into paper, newspaper, boxes, napkins, paper towels, egg cartons and more. Glass is crushed, heated and recycled into glass bottles and jars or used in insulation, floor tile, road construction projects and more. Steel or aluminum is heated, melted and recycled back into steel or aluminum cans. Plastics are shredded, melted and recycled into a variety of products, including plastic bottles, carpet, furniture, clothing and more.

The final step in the recycling process is closing the recycling loop by buying products made from recycled materials.

