

Commingled Recycling Guidance

Enhancing Public Health, Safety & Welfare

Who We Are and What We Do

The Washington Association of County Solid Waste Managers (WACSWM) serves as the collective voice for leadership professionals working in county solid waste programs throughout Washington.

Counties play a leading role in managing solid waste programs and share the responsibility for managing waste streams, including recycling, in a sustainable and environmentally-friendly manner with other local government agencies, the state and private industry.

We are committed to strategies that reduce waste and encourage recycling. As stewards of this critical public service, we consider this among our paramount responsibilities.



- ✓ *Solid Waste Programs*
- ✓ *Managing Waste Streams*
- ✓ *Sustainable Recycling*

The Problem

**We've made it easy
to throw things away.
*Maybe too easy.***



Today, most residents use a hauler-supplied wheeled cart for garbage and recycling collection. Regional privately-owned and operated material recovery facilities (MRFs) accept and process the contents of recycling carts where various recyclable items are commingled.

Commingled recycling developed as an easy way to encourage diverting waste from landfills and creating access to valuable commodities. However, commingling creates challenges, including increased contamination that traditional markets for our state's recycled materials are no longer willing to accept. China, which until recently was the destination for many of our recyclables, recently increased their standards for reduced contamination to currently unattainable levels in order to prevent the import of "foreign garbage".

As a result, our state is facing reduced markets and increased costs for recycled materials.

Emerging Solutions

WACSWM recognizes long-term recycling program changes should be addressed in many ways through a local government's Solid Waste Management Plan. Additional changes may be driven by market forces. State government also plays a significant role in the future of recycling in Washington along with many of our local service providers.

As we all continue to work and develop solutions to the significant challenges our recycling markets are facing, WACSWM has developed some tools to assist local government decision-making.

- **Short-term disposal guidance for unmarketable recyclables.** This guidance is currently posted on our website.
- **Guidance for commingled recycling programs** – core principles, what to include and what to remove or collect differently.

Commingled Recycling Core Principles

1. Recyclables should be **clean and dry.**
2. Eliminate “wishful recycling” – **When in doubt, throw it out.**
3. **Zero contamination is our goal.**

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

Newspaper
(including ads and inserts)

**Paperboard/
chipboard**
(cereal, cracker, shoe boxes)

Magazines

Tin/steel cans

HDPE Plastic
(such as milk jugs, certain detergent bottles, etc.)

Corrugated cardboard
(no waxy and coated boxes, no food contaminated boxes like pizza boxes)

Loose paper

Aluminum cans

PET Plastic
(such as soda and water bottles, certain juice bottles, etc.)

Envelopes

Additional Materials

Based on local market conditions, or different collection methods to reduce cross contamination of commingled recyclables, other materials may be considered for inclusion in local recycling programs. Local governments should work with their service providers to ensure proper long-term and stable markets for these additional recyclable materials.

Program Changes

Proposed changes that eliminate materials in existing commingled programs will take time to implement. However, educating the public that fewer, but overall cleaner materials will provide for long-term stable recycling markets should be a priority. Such changes should be done in cooperation with your local Solid Waste Advisory Committee and service providers.