

Think before you throw to recycle right



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Best intentions are not always enough and can sometimes do more harm than good. Despite increased understanding of the importance of recycling, confusion persists about what goes in to our recycling bins.

Many in the community are trying to do the right thing but are instead putting at risk real recyclables by contaminating the recycling bin with the wrong items.

This confusion has led the three largest material recovery facilities to set out common guidelines on correct recyclable items consistent across the whole of Perth (and much of WA), supported by a sector advertising campaign.

According to a Planet Ark report, 48 per cent of Australians are confused about the items that can be placed in household recycling bins.

Recycling contamination has steadily exacerbated from a level of eight per cent contamination to the current 15 - 20 per cent.

At its core, contamination simply means putting the wrong thing in the recycle bin. For example, scrunchable plastics, such as plastic bags, cling film, and plastic wrappers get swept up with paper and cardboard in the separation process and then contaminate the paper recycling stream.

Soft plastics should be placed in Redcycle collection bins near the checkout areas of most major supermarkets and will then be recycled in specialist facilities.

Ropes, hose pipes, clothes and tie down straps can get caught up and jammed in the machinery in recovery facilities.

This can end up costing ratepayers up to three times over – the cost of removing the contaminant from the recyclable stream, the cost of fixing the jammed machine and the cost of placing the contamination in landfill.

Other items to keep out of your recycling bin are polystyrene, meat trays and aerosols. Gas bottles, nappies and syringes should never be put in the recycling bin, as they are hazardous to workers and gas bottles can cause fires in trucks and recovery facilities.

Cans, glass bottles and jars, plastic bottles and containers need to be clean, empty and without lids before they go into the recycling bin - and keep them loose, not in bags. Plastic lids should be placed in the general waste bins as they are too small to be sorted by the machines at the recovery facilities.

As a general rule, items smaller than a golf ball cannot be recycled as they tend to fall through the sorting machinery.

Paper and cardboard need to be flat and clean – this means no shredded paper or greasy pizza boxes.

A global backdrop of tightened restrictions has further inflamed the issue of recycling contamination. China, one of the biggest export markets that take in recyclables from Australia, has banned unsorted waste and will only accept recyclable loads with contamination levels below 0.5 per cent.

It's no wonder our current contamination levels are causing concern. So it is now more important than ever to place the correct items in the recycling bin – to maintain our end markets for recyclables, to protect facility workers and to avoid the 'triple charge' of items processed through both recycling and landfill.

To find out more about what can or can't be included in your recycling bin, visit recycleright.wa.gov.au.



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