

# Recycling 101

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## Nation Sword Explained

In the past, China was the largest importer of the world's recycle commodities. The U.S. was 40% of the inbound stream. By 2017 China dreamed of blue skies - they wanted to clean up their air and water. Recycling that was coming into China was not necessarily all valuable materials. Much was being piled up and un-usable.

Effective March 2018, China banned all mixed paper from import. (This is a different paper grade than cardboard. Clean cardboard is still valuable.) They also reduced the acceptable contamination levels from ~3% to 0.5% for paper and plastic.

When recycling is sorted it is baled. Inspectors at the port check for contamination and moisture before it can be shipped.

## Republic Services' Response

- Educate our customers through press releases, social media, advertising and community outreach.
- Invest in technology at the recycling center in South Seattle. Optical sorters that are better at detecting materials coming over the conveyor belts to make sure things like a flattened milk jug isn't misplaced in a paper bale.
- Built new relationships with vendors domestically and internationally to take the materials.
- Add labor to the sorting line to pull out contamination and tangles that shut operations down.



All of these responses equal a cost to doing business. Recycling is not free. Some materials are not valuable to recycle but we still do it, because it's the right thing to do. Recycling is only 6% of the solution to our sustainability issues. We need to turn our focus on reducing the consumption.

## What Can You Do?

**Stop "Wish-cycling"** - Not everything can be recycled because it is not a valuable material or technology cannot handle it. **Some example of materials that cannot be recycled are a peanut can with the card-board tube and metal lids, plastic forks,**

**or even a Solo brand cup vs the same Solo brand plate.** *Technology cannot tell plastic unless it is bottle, tub or jug shaped.* There is no technology to separate the cardboard tub from the metal lids. Anything smaller than a business card will fall thru the machinery and end up on the floor swept away for garbage.

**Reduce Consumption** - use the junk mail unsubscribe services, reduce printing, stop buying convenience packaging and single use products. Bring your own coffee cup to the coffee stand. Refill reusable water bottles. Pack lunches in containers instead of baggies and single serve packaging. Donate unused items. Fix broken items. Our communities have repair fairs to help and some have tools you can rent rather than buying.

**Recycle Right** - all of the recycling materials must be Empty, Clean, and Dry to be recyclable. *No one is at the recycling center cleaning them.* When food or moisture gets on the materials, it becomes mold and is no longer valuable. If it is detected in the bale, the whole bale gets taken to the landfill.

### **Common Contaminators**

In this picture below of a recycling cart emptied out, there is nothing that is recyclable. Liquids and non-recyclable materials like napkins and coffee lids are not recyclable.



Picture to the right: *Wet cardboard is not recyclable. The moisture will cause mold. Boxes also need to flatten to 3 ft x 3 ft x 3ft to fit in the machinery.*

The plastic bag in the recycling can is also a problem. Plastic bags tangle around our equipment and cause long shut downs which are very costly. Please don't bag your recycling (only your garbage).

## Food is the top contaminator.

Do not recycling anything that is wet or still has food in the container.

**Empty, Clean, Dry!**

**Polystyrene “Styrofoam” is not recyclable in your curbside cart.** There are programs you can find to take it to be recycled. Bellevue residential and multifamily customers can take it to the Republic Services drop-off location: 1600 127th Ave NE Monday – Saturday



*These other materials can also be dropped off without cost at the Bellevue customer drop-off location: Small appliances, scrap metal, textiles, fluorescent tubes and bulbs, batteries, used cooking oil, rigid plastics. Limits and preparation guidelines apply.*

## **Take Plastic Bags Back to the Grocery Store Program**



All grocery bags, plastic film, bread bags, dry cleaning bags and Ziploc type bags (*if they are clean*) can be taken to the grocery store drop-off program.

This program recycles the bags to make products like Trex composite wood materials for playground equipment, park benches, decks, etc.

## **RESOURCES: When in doubt, find out!**

**[www.RepublicServicesNW.com](http://www.RepublicServicesNW.com)**

For bulky or other items search “what do I do with” + “King County” for a drop-off list.  
The Factoria transfer station takes hazardous materials and recycling.

**If you don't know, then throw it out. Don't contaminate the recycling.**

