

July 13th, 2018

Open Letter to the Community Regarding Recycling Changes

There has been a great deal of attention in the national media of late on changes in recycling markets, and how those changes impact the collection and processing of recyclable materials. We would like to offer a brief explanation and outline the changes taking place locally.

Recycling markets are volatile by nature and this has been one of the more turbulent stretches in recent history. Opinions differ on whether China's new import policies will last, or how bad the effects will be, but it's clear those effects are spreading across the country in varying degrees.

In the summer of 2017, China formally announced its import restriction intentions in a notice to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the ban went into effect at the start of 2018. The reason for this action was excessive contamination of recycling loads shipped from the United States. Evidence showed that in some cases the single-stream recycling contamination rate exceeded 15% over the past five years. Contamination included garbage, plastic bags, food debris, unacceptable plastics and waxed cardboard. Although Tompkins County's contamination rate remains among the lowest, these new restrictions are still applicable.

In addition, the prices for all materials have dropped over 50%. Our contracted partner, Casella Recycling, has done a tremendous job in shipping all of our materials domestically despite significant price drops. Due to limited or no market outlets for certain plastics, we have no choice but to remove them from our list of acceptable materials.

We are limiting acceptable curbside plastic containers to # 1,2 and 5 (water and soda bottles, milk and juice jugs, tubs, carry-out and berry containers) as well as removing rigid plastics from the single-stream mix. Rigid plastics are acceptable only if brought directly to the Recycling and Solid Waste Center:

- Plastic Baskets
- Plastic Buckets (Clean)
- Plastic Garbage Cans or Recycling Carts (Wheels and axles removed)
- Coroplast Campaign Election Signs (Metal removed)
- Plastic Crates
- Plastic Drums & Totes (Cut in half)
- Plastic Lawn Furniture
- Plastic Pet Carriers (Metal removed)
- Plastic Shelving
- Plastic Bottles from Water Coolers

Plastic bags have never been accepted at the curb, but can be brought to the RSWC. Acceptable plastic bags and films include:

- Flexible 6-pack rings
- Plastic grocery bags (Clean and dry)

- Plastic retail bags (Clean, dry, and string ties removed)
- Plastic newspaper bags
- Plastic dry-cleaning bags
- Plastic wrap from paper products (Paper towels, toilet paper, etc)
- Plastic wrap from beverage products (Water bottles, sports drinks, etc)
- Plastic pallet wrap
- Plastic air pillows found inside shipping packages (Air removed)

The message is clear - we need to 'clean the stream' and 'recycle right.'

That means clean your recyclables before putting them in your curbside bin or at the public drop-off of the RSWC – all jars, plastics, tin foil, etc. must be rinsed out to remove any food residue. This also goes for paper and cardboard.

Our Department recently published a new curbside recycling guidelines brochure and schedule, and is working on additional printed material on the acceptable rigid plastics and single-use film bags. Also, display boards will be posted at the public drop off area to assist residents.

Thank you for doing your part to ensure Tompkins County's recycled items continue to meet the standards required for the commodities market.

As always, feel free to contact our office with any questions at (607) 273-6632.

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