



Mixed Curbside Residential Recycling Myths

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But what about the other materials we encounter in our day-to-day lives?

Use these recycling rules, expert tips, and dispel all recycling myths to become an effective recycling ambassador and recycle right.



Identify The Myths Of Recycling And Become An Expert



MYTH:

Most Americans recycle all they can.

ANSWER: False

Research shows convenience and commitment are required for maximum recycling. For instance, do you have recycling containers in multiple rooms in your home? If not, recyclables in rooms other than the kitchen often get thrown away. Plus, the more members in a household who commit to recycle, the better the quality of the materials they recycle.



MYTH:

The recycling arrows (Mobius) on a container mean it is recyclable at a Material Recovery Facility (MRF).

ANSWER: Only in some cases

Manufacturers strive to get eco-friendly information on their product labels. The FTC requires that a product have at least 60% access to local programs (like a Material Recovery Facility processing) to include the Mobius symbol on products. However, the Mobius is not a reliable indicator of whether something is acceptable to recycle in your mixed curbside recycling. There are thousands of plastic products and packaging, and each may have its own unique chemical composition. Recycle plastics by shape: bottles, jars, jugs and tubs.



MYTH:

Containers must be squeaky clean in order to be recycled.

ANSWER: False

While all bottles, cans, and containers should be clean, dry, and free of most food waste before you place them in your recycling container, they don't need to be spotless. The goal is to make sure they are clean enough to avoid contaminating other materials, like paper. Try using a spatula to scrape cans and jars, or using a small amount of water, shake the container to remove most residue.



MYTH:

It doesn't matter if something belongs in the recycling cart, the hauler will sort everything anyway.

ANSWER: False

There are increasing amounts of non-recyclable items sent to Material Recovery Facilities, and all of them must be removed by hand by trained staff or mechanically sorted so they don't contaminate the high-value recyclables. Non-recyclable items placed in your recycling containers increase the cost of recycling, slow the process, and pose safety risks to employees. Focus on only recycling the most valuable materials—clean bottles, cans, paper and cardboard. If you're not sure whether something is recyclable, throw it in the garbage to protect the acceptable recyclable items in your recycling container!



MYTH:

Hoses, tanks, shower curtains, swing sets, etc. are made of plastic, so they must be recyclable.

ANSWER: False

If it's not "bottles, cans, paper or cardboard" it probably doesn't belong in your curbside mixed recycling cart and may even require special handling. Just because an item is made from plastic, or contains plastic parts, doesn't mean recycling facilities can handle it. There are other resources (e.g., Earth911.org) that can help answer questions about what to do with non-recyclables or household hazardous waste.



MYTH:

Aerosol cans are acceptable in the recycle bin.

ANSWER: Varies by jurisdiction

Most recycling programs accept empty and dry aerosol cans without the caps—if the cans are not empty, they can be dangerous. Fires have been caused in baler chambers and collection trucks from trace amounts of chemicals in the cans. Plus cans have been known to become projectiles when densified/baled if the propellant is still present. Waste Management facilities and commodity vendors accept steel, mixed metal, and aluminum aerosol packages. Multi-material aerosol packages are not recyclable. There is no gray area here from a processor standpoint. However, some cities still list aerosols on the non-acceptable lists. Check with your local municipality for more information.



MYTH:

All types of glass bottles and jars are recyclable.

ANSWER: Varies by jurisdiction

Glass recycling varies by jurisdiction and communities across the U.S. Some communities collect glass at drop-off locations only, some collect glass separately at the curb or with other containers, and many include glass with all other recyclables.

Bottle bill laws in CA, CT, OR, IA, MI, ME, VT, MA, NY allow for the return of a per-bottle deposit when bottles are returned to return-centers or retailers for recycling. Please refer to your community's website for more information on how to recycle glass.