

# CONTAMINATION AND THE RECYCLING PROCESS



## WHAT IS RECYCLING CONTAMINATION?

Contamination occurs when anything other than the specific item you were recycling gets mixed into the recycling process. For example, if you are recycling cardboard with plastic inside or aluminum cans wrapped and tied inside a plastic bag. The only time you should commingle recycling materials together is when the parameters of the program allow. Food waste, oils, dirt, rocks and other debris should also be kept from the recycling stream. Contaminated loads of recycling can potentially result in the whole load being disposed at the landfill.

## CONTAMINATION IMPACT TO THE RECYCLING PROCESS

- ❖ Reduces the value of the material – It will degrade the quality of your recyclables, which in turn reduces the market value.
- ❖ Inability to recycle – Too many contaminants in a load could mean your local recycler will reject the load and send directly to the landfill.
- ❖ Breaking recycling machinery – Not all recycling machinery is equipped to take all types of material. Plastic bags/film and notorious for clogging up sorting equipment and lines.
- ❖ Impacts worker safety – Some materials need to be collected a certain way due to safety concerns for recycling workers. For example, glass in a sort line could be not safe with people picking out other contaminants by hand.
- ❖ Compromises relationship with recycling service providers – Contamination not only reduces the value, but it can cause mechanical and physical harm during the recycling process. It is not uncommon for businesses with repeated contamination issues to be refused service by a company.



## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REDUCE CONTAMINATION

- ❖ Label recycling containers – Place labels and pictures on recycling containers.
- ❖ Rinse and wipe clean – Clean, rinse and wipe containers from recyclables such as plastic food containers.
- ❖ Don't just throw - Not all recyclables can be sorted into the same recycling container. Support with education and continue to educate.

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**THINK BEFORE YOU THROW**