



City of Eugene Recycling FAQs

Q. Why does the City recommend, "When in doubt, find out or throw it out?"

A. Although we advocate for recycling, improperly recycled items cause contamination that negatively impacts the entire recycling system. That's why it's better to put an unknown item in the trash than to risk putting trash in the recycling. Better yet, the City encourages contacting waste haulers directly to confirm whether specific items are acceptable. We realize that there are certain recyclables that get collected separately in our community that aren't allowed in the commingle bin. For example, there are certain grocery stores in town that collect plastic bags to be recycled. These bags are sent to a special facility that can manage this type of waste. They are NOT allowed in the commingle bin, but there is a way to get these items recycled. Same goes for electronics, paint products, wood waste, and, in some cases, food waste. If you are interested in finding out where you can recycle difficult items, we recommend checking out Lane County Waste Management's list of difficult-to-recycle items (left-hand side bar):

<http://lanecounty.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=3585881&pageId=4243964>

Q. Why has this change come about now?

A. Much of the entire West Coast's plastics and mixed paper recycling has previously been exported to China, where it was allowable to have a higher level of contamination (contamination is trash that ends up in the final sorting process). However, China's new "National Sword" initiative has limited the amount of contamination allowed in imported recyclable materials to 0.5 percent. This, combined with lower petroleum prices that make creating new plastics cheaper, has led to a reduction in market demand for previously recyclable plastics and paper.

Q. What does "contamination" mean in recycling?

A. Contamination refers to any material in the commingle or glass bin that do not belong there. For example, plastic bags become tangled in the processing machinery and create a safety hazard for workers who must manually cut them away. Plastic bags are one of many items that are considered "contamination" in our commingled recycling system. Please refer to our list of acceptable items to determine what to put in your commingle bin.

Q. Why is there a cost to recycling service if haulers sell the materials collected?

A. Any fees collected for recycling collection are to cover the costs of the services the haulers provide in our community, which include picking up the recyclable material and moving it to the next destination. Because recycling markets are currently down and not anticipated to change any time soon, the haulers' system for collection and processing is happening at a loss for our area garbage haulers—which are private companies. We've called recycling "free" for a long time because it was at one point. However, due to market fluctuations there is now a cost associated with processing some of the materials (like plastics and mixed paper). We are using this as an opportunity to re-educate people on how our system has changed over the years.



Q. Can color-tinted soda and other transparent plastic drink bottles go in the commingle recycling bin?

A. Yes! As long as they are rinsed clean and dry with no caps (caps/lids go in the trash), transparent, color-tinted and non color-tinted plastic is accepted in the commingle recycling bin.

Q. What type of plastic jugs are recyclable?

A. We are currently accepting ONLY milk jugs in the commingle recycling. This means that both opaque milk jugs and transparent ones are recyclable. Please rinse them well, drain out any remaining liquid, and remove (and throw away) lids.

Q. Why isn't the cost of waste hauling service going down?

A. Because our recycling system is dependent on having a market for the end material, and markets for recyclable material are either depleting or are currently non-existent, garbage haulers (who process and transport the material) are experiencing a huge increase in price, even compared to one year ago. For this reason, you will not see prices go down. Recycling used to be marketed as a free service, but unfortunately that has changed significantly over the past year.

Q. What are the main changes to commingle recycling in Eugene?

A. Our system was previously able to accept plastic bottles, tubs, and jugs in the Eugene commingle recycling bin. Plastic drink bottles and milk jugs are still accepted, but tubs are not. We are also no longer able to accept small pieces of paper such as paper shreds. Examples of items are still not recyclable in our system include: plastic bags, dirty cardboard such as grease-stained pizza boxes, flower pots, rigid plastics such as clamshells (i.e. packaging that berries or restaurant leftovers are frequently packaged in), light bulbs, straws, all lids, plastic or other beverage cups, and broken glass.

Q. How clean do bottles, cans, and other recycling need to be?

A. In order for producers to be able to reuse the materials we recycle, all debris such as food residue must be removed. Recycling placed in your bin should be rinsed clean and dried. Otherwise, liquid and other residue can contaminate adjacent items such as paper and cardboard, rendering otherwise recyclable goods into trash.

Q. How can I recycle items that are not accepted in the Eugene recycling stream?

A. There are various community resources available to aid in recycling specific items. For example, plastic bags are recyclable at many area grocery stores ([find locations](#)), and Styrofoam blocks and packing peanuts can be recycled through a [program at St. Vincent de Paul](#). For other items, Lane County has developed a comprehensive tool designed to answer specific questions related to whether an item is recyclable, the [Garbage Guru](#).