



## City of Eugene Recycling Changes and Impacts: FAQs

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

**A.** Our system was previously able to accept plastic bottles, tubs, and jugs in the Eugene commingle (most recyclables collected together) curbside 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 that 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. The following is a list of items that are no longer accepted in our recycling stream:

- **Plastic tubs**
- **Any plastic item that isn't a transparent bottle or milk jug**
- **Aseptic containers (such as milk cartons or shelf stable soy milk containers)**
- **Shredded paper**

Contamination reduces the economy and effectiveness of our recycling system. Plastic bags, take-out food containers, plant pots, and lids of any kind should never be placed in commingled recycling bins. Any items that are not clearly recyclable should be put in the trash—when in doubt, throw it out.

### **Q. Why are certain items, such as margarine tubs or milk cartons, no longer accepted in commingled recycling?**

**A.** Market changes have significantly limited or removed opportunities to recycle certain plastic products, and limited markets for other previously recyclable items.

### **Q. So which plastics can I recycle now?**

**A.** Here's what's important to remember about recycling plastic:

- Sort by shape and not by number. Plastic drink bottles and milk jugs go in the recycling bin. Check the City of Eugene's Waste Prevention website at <https://www.eugene-or.gov/1470/Recycling> for any recycling questions you have.
- Absolutely do not put plastic bags of any kind in your recycling container at home. Putting them in the recycling bin causes major problems at the sorting facilities – it gets caught up in conveyors, and they must stop and pull them out. That not only costs money, but it's also dangerous for the workers. Check your local grocery store for bag collection options.
- Do not place plastic lids, clamshell take out containers, flower pots, plastic buckets or any other item that is not accepted in the commingled recycling bins.

### **Q. What type of plastic jugs are recyclable?**

**A.** Haulers 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.



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

**A.** Yes! If 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. 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 online tool and phone app designed to answer specific questions related to whether an item is recyclable, [Waste Wise](#). You may also contact your hauler to find out if a particular material is recyclable or not.

**Q. Can I continue taking the plastic bags that weren't allowed into my curbside commingled recycling bin to my grocery store?**

**A.** There remain some opportunities for plastic bags – check your local grocery store for a collection container.

**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. I can't stand throwing this plastic away. Should I stockpile it until things change?**

**A.** Storing recyclables can be problematic. Food residue in containers can attract bugs and rodents and break down the material so that it isn't marketable. The best way to ensure you're recycling as much as possible is to continue to follow the list of what goes in the recycling bin at home or at work.



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### **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 mixed into recycling). 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](https://www.eugene-or.gov/1470/Recycling) at <https://www.eugene-or.gov/1470/Recycling> to determine what to put in your commingle bin.

### **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. 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. Could these changes potentially impact my garbage bill?**

**A.** In Eugene, we have not had to increase rates since September 2014, but this year, major changes in recycling markets have significantly impacted the cost of handling and processing recyclables collected from homes and businesses. In our community, and many others, the cost of recycling is included in garbage rates, and these costs have steadily increased as the system has tried to adjust to market changes. Our goal is to contain costs while ensuring that we continue to reduce, reuse and recycle as much of the materials that we generate as possible.



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**Q. I've heard that recycling is getting sent to landfills. Is this true?**

**A.** With a few small exceptions, the items that are accepted in home recycling in our region are still getting recycled. More items may have to be disposed if markets for them disappear. If recyclables do go to a landfill, it would be as a last resort, for the fewest items possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality keeps a list on their website of all recyclers that have requested to dispose of materials. It can be found on the 'recycling markets' page found here: <http://www.oregon.gov/deq/mm/Pages/Oregon-Recycling-Laws.aspx>.

**Q. What happens to stuff in recycling bins that isn't recyclable?**

**A.** Placing items that are not accepted in to the recycling bins can cause significant issues.

- It adds costs to the system because it must be sorted out.
- It causes safety hazards – like when plastic bags get caught in the equipment and workers must pull them out.
- It makes other recyclables less viable to be sold to manufacturers.
- It won't get recycled.

**Q. Why aren't there more options to recycle this stuff locally or at least domestically?**

**A.** There are two primary reasons for this that have developed over the past couple of decades:

- The U.S. manufactures fewer products than it used to, so there has been much lower demand domestically for the recyclables that serve as the raw materials for products and packaging.
- Many Chinese manufacturers have been willing and able to pay more for the recyclables than American companies, so the companies that get the recyclables after they are collected have sent them to China.

**Q. What are some other options if I can't recycle the plastics I have?**

**A.** Recycling has never been the perfect solution for reducing waste. Before recycling, reduce and reuse. That can be difficult – plastic is everywhere. Try using your produce bags twice or use cloth bags instead; and look for other ways to reduce the amount of plastic you use, such as bringing your own reusable containers and buying from the bulk section at the store. If you can make a better choice at the store, do it---plastic recycling opportunities are extremely limited.