



RECYCLING CONTAMINATION- *A HAULERS*
PERSPECTIVE

Some good news....

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Its almost dinner time, so I will be quick!!!

And

I love to talk trash and answer any questions that I can so.... Lets be interactive!!!

Some Background about your presenter.....

- ▶ In the Waste Industry since 1994
- ▶ Held most all positions in the Waste & Recycling industry from Driver to Region Manager
- ▶ Worked in many different markets... Midwest, Upper Midwest, Southeast
- ▶ Managed MRF's
- ▶ Experienced in Textile Recycling
- ▶ Work in post collections transportation of waste and recycling

What is Contamination?

▶ **Defining Contamination**

- ▶ What is recycling contamination? In short, it's anything other than what you are specifically trying to collect for recycling. For instance, if you are collecting material x for recycling, anything other than material x is a contaminant. Even recyclable materials, such as plastic and other paper products, can act as contaminants if they are disposed of in the wrong recycling container. For instance, sorted white ledger or office paper is usually recycled separately from corrugated cardboard (OCC) because these are considered two separate grades of paper and are valued at different amounts. If your company does have an agreement with your recycling service provider to collect OCC and office paper as two separate commodities, mixing the two together will contaminate your recycling stream and can affect any rebates you might receive. Similarly, if someone throws plastic into your OCC stream, this would be considered contamination and could have serious negative consequences for your recycling program, including a possibility of that OCC load being rejected and sent to the landfill. The only time it is okay to "comingle" or mix recyclables together is when you have an agreement to do so with your recycling service provider. Likewise, recyclables containing residues such as oil, food waste, and the like (unless specifically accepted by your recycling company) are considered contaminants and should not be added to your recycling stream.

Why Does Contamination Matter???

- ▶ As we mentioned previously, contaminants can have serious negative consequences for your recycling program. Here are just a few examples:
- ▶ **Degrading material values and reducing recycling rebates** – Contamination, even if the contaminant is itself recyclable, will degrade the quality of your recyclables, which in turn lessens their market value.
- ▶ **Causing an inability to recycle** -If there are too many contaminants in a recycling load, sometimes the recycling service provider will not accept the materials or recycling and the items will be sent to the landfill.
- ▶ **Breaking recycling machinery** – Not all recycling machinery is equipped to take all types of material. Some items, like plastic film, can gum up sorting equipment if it is thrown into the wrong recycling container.
- ▶ **Causing safety hazards for recycling workers** – Some materials need to be collected a certain way due to safety concerns for recycling workers. For instance, glass or electronic waste can be a very dangerous contaminant if it is added to the wrong recycling container.
- ▶ **Hurting relationship with recycling service providers** – Because contamination not only reduces the value of recyclables but can also 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 recycling company over time.

What it's really about...

If our recycling stream is contaminated we can't be sustainable environmentally or economically, and that is simply not acceptable!!!



How did we get here?

It didn't used to be this way, what happened??

In the push for more recycling, haulers had to make it easy.... Residents and businesses don't want to source separate.

In comes Single stream....It worked! Volumes increased, buy in and acceptance increase, commodity prices sky rocket....life is good!!! But wait...

With high demand, a higher level of contamination was accepted by the buyers, then comes China...

.05% contamination maximum when the industry standard is approximately 2-3%

What are haulers options???

Stop picking it up

Haul contaminated recycling directly to the landfills

Reduce items allowed (Glass has been banned from recycling in many communities)

Additional labor and technology in MRF operations

Raise service rates-Many haulers have been renegotiating contracts or cancelling services all together.

Charge back commercial clients for contamination

Fines

Education

Revert Commercial & Industrial clients back to source separation and only accept office paper/OCC

What are our option (Continued)

Legislation-

A bill has passed the Florida House & Senate that requires municipalities to address contamination in curbside recycling programs, as part of the legislation hauler's and MRF's are not responsible for handling contaminated material as defined by contracts. Contracts would also have to list strategies for reducing contamination, rejecting contaminated material, enforcing strategies and educating the public.

2018 GRC Annual Meeting

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Now....

Let's talk about it!

What can YOU do?

Summary

Haulers have tried every one of these options with different levels of success, the reality is we NEED to continue and increase recycling. The fact is it will cost more.

That reinforces the need for organizations like the GRC to push towards education about the importance of recycling and the realities of what the consequences of not doing it brings.