



BRIEF

Akron, Ohio's ban on glass recycling creates confusion between city and processor

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@_PyintheSky • Akron, Ohio recently announced that it would no longer accept glass through its curbside recycling program, attributing the change to

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Waste Management's loss of a recycled glass market. Waste Management claims it never requested the change, [reports Cleveland.com](#).

City officials raised the issue at a Nov. 26 city council meeting in response to information from Waste Management's public sector representative. Akron's public services director now reportedly says that nobody at Waste Management called for the ban — city leaders chose to go that route because Waste Management provided information indicating an increased cost to the city if it continues glass recycling.

- While the glass ban reportedly is under review, residents are still being asked not to include the material in their curbside bins at this time. In the meantime, the city recommends they either store glass until the policy is decided or find a way to recycle it elsewhere.

Dive Insight:

Market changes have prompted dozens of municipalities across the country to stop accepting glass over the past couple of years, depending on regional markets. A [recent report](#) from the Northeast Recycling Council estimates that 38% of the glass sent to MRFs in the Northeast ended up in

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landfills last year via direct disposal or use as alternative daily cover. Similar challenges have also been reported recently in Virginia and nearby areas.

Like much of the United States, Ohio has been hit by rapid changes to the recycling industry, many of which were brought on by China's tighter import regulations. The Toledo suburb of Oregon, for instance, suspended its curbside recycling program for two years after Waste Management requested a rate increase due to unfavorable market conditions. A portion of that city's recyclables already had been going to landfill prior to the program suspension.

The recycling market changes have put both municipalities and recycling industry players in a bind. The existing business model's profitability has tanked, and service providers are requesting rate increases from cities — with some smaller businesses folding altogether. Even though glass isn't affected by China's policies, the fact that it's viewed as an added cost by many service providers has made it more vulnerable in current contract discussions.

While many cities had profit-sharing models for their collected recyclables, that has all but disappeared — instead, cities are paying to have their recyclables collected and processed.

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Leaders now have the tricky task of deciding whether to suspend recycling programs until markets improve — knowing that once curbside programs end, it's difficult to get the public to re-start — or continue the programs at a high cost to the city.

Akron's situation presents a unique predicament: Nobody really wants to take the blame for removing items from a recycling program or ending it altogether. If Akron's leaders had informed the public that the city would take a loss if it continued glass recycling, it likely could have avoided the current confusion and poor public perception. Further adding to the public confusion is the fact that Waste Management has indeed sought contract changes and material bans in nearby municipalities — even if it didn't specifically request the glass ban in Akron.

Recommended Reading:

 Cleveland.com

[Akron's ban on recycling glass based on faulty information](#) 

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