

RESIDENTIAL RECYCLING OF EMPTY STEEL PAINT CANS

Use up the product so the paint can is empty

After purchasing only the paint needed, residents should use it up on the job at hand. The amount of paint needed for a project should be calculated as carefully as wallpaper is. Not only is this more economical, it is also environmentally sound.

If paint is leftover, it can be properly stored for future projects, or donated to churches, community groups and others who may use it. Once the paint is used up, the lid should be left off the can (but saved for recycling) to let the remaining film of paint dry inside the can and on the lid. A thin layer of dry paint is acceptable for recycling, as is the paper label and any incidental plastic components. For the resident, a properly prepared steel can is a recyclable can.



Recycle empty paint cans with other steel cans

Residents should recycle empty steel paint cans and lids with steel food cans and other recyclable materials in their curbside program or at a local drop-off site. When empty, paint cans may be recycled in the same manner as other steel cans. The key to processing empty paint cans is the secondary processor, including ferrous scrap dealers, haulers and others. They may need support from local government because of related but inapplicable regulatory considerations. Processors may contact their SRI regional manager for more information.

What to do with paint cans that are not empty

Many municipalities also provide household hazardous waste service, which would be applicable for solvent-based paint. Whether these programs are ongoing or consist of special collection days, full and partially full cans of solvent-based paint are collected in quantity and emptied. Dry, empty cans are either processed for end market consumption or mixed at the material recovery facility with other steel cans from curbside and drop-off programs.

Communities recycling paint cans collected through household hazardous waste collection programs should also encourage residents to participate in paint can recycling. These programs should divert empty paint cans to their residential recycling program.

About steel can recycling

Steel food cans, paint and aerosol cans, and steel lids and closures are recycled into new steel products. Among these are new cans, automobiles, appliances, construction materials, tools and toys. Steel can end markets include steel mills and foundries. New steel is made with old steel. So all of today's steel products contain recycled steel and are recyclable. The steel can's magnetic attraction allows steel cans, paint and otherwise, to be magnetically separated from other recyclables, or from municipal solid waste. Steel cans are usually baled, although they may be flattened or shredded. Scrap dealers and detinners serve as secondary processors for steel cans.

About the Steel Recycling Institute

The Steel Recycling Institute (SRI), a unit of the American Iron & Steel Institute, educates the solid waste management industry, government, business and ultimately the consumer about the economic and environmental benefits of recycling steel. SRI works to ensure the continuing development of the steel recycling infrastructure.