

RECYCLING STEEL CANS FROM FOODSERVICE FACILITIES

About Steel Can Recycling

Steel cans are found in every foodservice setting. The most common are the one-gallon cans. Other steel cans, such as those seen in the grocery store, are also found in commercial and institutional kitchens. Additionally, many glass and plastic containers used in these kitchens have steel lids and closures. Steel cans, lids and closures are recyclable and should be recycled. In fact, all steel products are recyclable, and more than 65 percent of the steel produced in the United States is recycled. Simply put, the steel industry needs old steel to make new steel. By recycling your steel cans, you not only provide the steel industry with a much-needed resource, you also divert material from the landfill, help save energy, and preserve precious domestic natural resources.



Always rinse out food cans

Steel cans (and other recyclable food containers) must be rinsed for basic sanitation reasons because they are usually stored for a period of time before they are picked up or delivered for recycling. Rinsing the steel cans requires only the removal of most food particles. It is important, however, to rinse cans and other containers without wasting water. No one should exchange one precious resource for another. To make the best use of water already used in the kitchen, rinse steel cans in leftover dishwater used to wash larger kitchen utensils, such as pots and pans. Or run them through an automatic dishwasher in available empty spaces.

Flatten the cans for storage

Steel cans may be flattened manually or mechanically to reduce their volume for efficient storage as well as for economical transportation. For manual flattening, trim the bottom end from the rinsed can in the same way the lid was removed. Step on the body of the open-ended can to flatten it for storage. Steel lids have sharp edges, but can be stored in an empty can until it is full of lids. The can may then be crimped or taped shut for carrying to storage. Cans may also be flattened with the bottom end intact if a hand-operated, long-lever crusher is used. These may be purchased or self-fabricated locally. Mechanical flattening is done with a specially designed machine, which effectively flattens all sizes of metal cans (with the bottom end intact). These machines also flatten plastic and aluminum containers.

Recycle through local options

Commercial businesses and institutional establishments should contact their waste hauler to negotiate arrangements that provide for dockside recycling of steel cans and other materials. This normally means that the hauler provides and services a container for the recyclables. The cost of this service should be balanced against the incremental revenue from the scrap value of the recyclables and the avoided solid waste removal costs. An alternative is to work with a ferrous scrap processor or independent recycler. Arrangements may be made to have steel cans picked up (along with other recyclable materials) or to deliver them to a scrap yard or recycling facility when a suitable load is accumulated.

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.