



Is Recycling a Waste?

It seems like every day another negative recycling story hits the news. Here's a recent sampling:

As Costs Skyrocket, More U.S. Cities Stop Recycling (NY Times, 3/16/19);
Recycling is a Dumpster Fire. Literally (On Point Radio, 3/14/19).

Is This the End of Recycling? (Atlantic Monthly, 3/4/19);

Help, We're Drowning in Recycling (Wall Street Journal, 3/2/19);

U.S. Cities Have Nowhere to Put Recycling (CBS Evening News, 3/20/19);

It's no wonder our neighbors, friends and family are asking "is my recycling just going to a landfill?" or "should I even bother?"

China closing its doors to our mixed paper and unsorted plastics was a wake-up call. Over the last ten years our recycling habits got sloppy. (Wishful recycling, anyone?) But China kept gobbling up everything we sent, sorted out the bad stuff, and made new packaging and products from the good stuff – until they said, "enough."

There is more to the story

What the headlines aren't telling us is this: there are markets for our paper and plastic, just not in China. Other countries including India, Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam are buying the mixed paper China no longer wants, and that's where much of what's collected from Massachusetts is recycled into new products. The difference is it's now a buyer's market. The value of mixed paper has dropped from \$75/ton to \$5/ton. This means less revenue to offset the costs of processing our recyclables. The good news? It's all still getting recycled.

Cardboard is mostly sold to paper mills in the U.S. or Canada, and multiple U.S. mills are expanding or re-opening to start taking scrap paper and cardboard. For example, Pratt Industries, a U.S. recycler, opened its fourth new 100% recycled paper mill in Valparaiso, Indiana last year, and they'll open their fifth mill in Ohio this year. Pratt makes boxes for the US Postal Service, Amazon, and Home Depot.

There's good news with plastics, too. The U.S. plastics recycling industry is healthy and wants our soda bottles, milk jugs, yogurt cups and margarine tubs. Companies like EFS Plastics, KW Plastics, Buckeye Plastics and Trigon Plastics use recycled plastics to make consumer products, automotive parts, construction materials, and even 100% recycled Adirondack chairs. At the [Northeast Recycling Council](#) meeting in Delaware last week, all of these companies made their message clear: we need all the recycled containers you can send us, and more.

The silver lining (and maybe the irony) is that National Sword is bringing jobs and investment to the U.S. and enabling recycling companies to buy recycled materials that they previously had to compete with China for.

What about the increased cost of recycling?

While market experts expect the value of recyclables to increase as material quality improves and domestic capacity expands, let's first remember why we recycle. Recycling is about saving resources, conserving energy, and reducing our dependence on landfills and incinerators. As the impact of climate change escalates, it's critical to embrace the circular economy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and lower our carbon footprint. Recycling does all of that, and creates jobs.

Recycling is a service. Trucks, labor, fuel – none of that is free, but it's a service worth paying for. It's also a public good – like schools, public transit, parks, and clean air. It's hard to put a dollar value on the benefits for our community, because they're invaluable.

Together we can reframe the narrative

As recycling coordinators, haulers, businesses, schools, volunteers – we all play a role in educating our residents, customers, students and neighbors about what smart recycling means and why it's important. Keeping the bad stuff out of our recycling bins means the good stuff gets recycled. This will ensure we're supporting a supply chain of recycled materials that go back into our economy.

It's hard work, but the pay-off is real for our communities and for the environment. Let's rebuild the public trust in recycling together, by sharing this newsletter and spreading the Recycle Smart message.

Shredded Paper 101

Shredded paper is inherently recyclable. It's high quality paper with nice long fibers. The problem is **where** you recycle it. **Shredded paper does not belong in single stream recycling, even if it's in a bag** (and no- it doesn't make a difference if it's a paper or a plastic bag).



When shredded paper gets mixed in with other household recyclables and sent to the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) - it turns into confetti. As fun as confetti can be – this is not the party the MRF had in mind. The shredded paper sticks to glass, cans, plastic – anything with a tiny bit of moisture on it - riding along with those materials as a "contaminant." In the end, the shredded paper doesn't make it into the paper bales to be recycled.

As we lead up to Tax Day - help spread the message about **where** shredded paper can be recycled to ensure this material has a chance to become your next coffee filter or egg carton.

Get Social This Tax Day

April 15th will be here before you know it and folks are itching to finally get rid of some of their old tax documents.

[Download this GIF](#) and post on your Facebook, Twitter or Instagram with the text below:



Finished with your taxes and ready to finally shred those 7 year old tax receipts? Make sure you take them to a local shredding event or location that offers shredding & recycling services. Shredded paper doesn't belong in your recycling bin (it's 7 years bad luck!)

Don't use social media? You can add Recycle Smart information and images to any newsletters, emails, or printed materials you send out.

**** If your community provides paper shredding & recycling services as part of spring event or year-round – remember to modify this message to let them know the good news! ****

Thank you for your partnership, and for your commitment to smarter recycling.

The Recycle Smart Team at MassDEP



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