

## Opinion

LETTERS

# What We Can Do to Reduce Waste

Readers offer their ideas for improving recycling programs and reducing packaging and goods that end up in landfills.

March 24, 2019



Eric Griffin on a recycling collection route in Sunrise, where the mayor questioned the severity of contamination from regular garbage. Scott McIntyre for The New York Times



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## To the Editor:

Re "[As Costs Surge, Cities' Recycling Becomes Refuse](#)" (front page, March 17):

Your recycling story offers a parade of horrors and cites "hundreds" of failing programs. But how about the thousands of programs that continue to successfully collect, process and sell recyclables collected from the curbside?

There have been several market downturn since curbside recycling took off in the late 1980s. This may be the worst, in part because of the expansion of these programs to collect materials such as mixed paper and mixed plastics that never had strong markets. Given unrealistic recycling goals and a failure to properly educate citizens on how to recycle properly, no wonder some programs are struggling.

Yes, recycling is in a rough patch. Yet entrepreneurs are smelling opportunity in these raw materials. Sixteen paper mills in the United States have announced expansions in their capacity to use recycled paper. Seven of these mills specified that they will be using mixed paper as a raw material.

I hope that in your next story on recycling, you will investigate [successful programs such as Seattle's](#) or the one in my home county, Montgomery County, Maryland, and learn what is working.

Chaz Miller  
Silver Spring, Md.

*The writer is chairman of the Recycling Markets Committee of the Northeast Recycling Council.*

## To the Editor:

Recycling took us down the wrong road, a detour from the problem of too much waste, particularly plastics. Many of these items are single use, made to be discarded. Even if these items were recycled, the

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process itself is wasteful, requiring energy to create new items, which often cannot be recycled further.

We need to reduce packaging and create packaging that can be composted or will biodegrade naturally. For this we need more “green chemistry” to find alternatives to dangerous chemicals and elements. We also need to slow consumption. Buy less, of better quality, and keep it longer. Require that manufacturers take back their products once their useful life is done. Make products designed to last as long as possible, and design them for repair.

Sound hard? Not as hard as dealing with the huge landfills and toxic chemicals that will result from the recycling crisis.

Mary Makofske  
Warwick, N.Y.

**To the Editor:**

I’m willing to risk the opprobrium of other readers by suggesting that the greatest share of blame for waste falls to us as consumers. Check your closets, drawers, attics, garages, anywhere you stash stuff. I’m willing to bet that 80 percent of the contents haven’t been used in the past 12 months.

I know people who, having filled every conceivable nook and cranny in their residences, have to resort to renting storage spaces to house their junk. This is insanity. Every item that we store is something that was purchased, with all its attendant wasted packaging.

We could reduce our waste disposal problem instantly by just keeping our wallets in our pockets, our Apple Pay turned off, our credit cards in the drawers and our fingers off the keyboards. Aside from the money you save and the waste you avoid, you may find time to enjoy the noncommercial things of life!

Steven J. Livesey  
Norman, Okla.

**To the Editor:**

As a regular traveler to Germany, I have long been impressed with its intensive and well-organized recycling efforts. I imagine that country faces many of the same challenges as the United States. An examination of other countries’ experiences, something frequently missing from our news coverage, would help us to better understand potential solutions to this vexing problem.

Timothy M. Empkie  
Providence, R.I.



A Handyman Asks: After Servicing a Home, Can I Get Paid to Service My Clients’ Other Needs?



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