

Are You Sure That's Recyclable?

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Up to 25% of items in your home recycling bins actually belong in the trash.

Have you ever tossed something in the recycling bin, not knowing whether or not it belongs there, but hoping it can somehow be recycled? That practice is known as 'wishcycling' and it's starting to cause problems for the complex machines that make curbside single-sort recycling possible. It may seem like a small detail - a wrong item in the recycling bin - but it represents a global problem that's preventing thousands of tons of recyclables from ever seeing a second life. That's probably got you thinking, 'so what should and shouldn't belong in the recycling bin?' Below are some of the most common recycling mistakes so you can avoid making them in the future.



Recycling is often sorted through a series of belts and bins. During the process, shreds of paper essentially become litter and can become mixed with non-paper materials. Watch for seasonal county shred events to dispose of these tiny pieces or put them in the garbage.



Oil from pizza, which usually ends up on the bottom of a pizza box, can contaminate an entire batch of paper, making it impossible for the recycling center to recycle the batch. Next time, tear off the not-greasy top, which can be recycled, and throw the bottom in the trash.



Items like wood, concrete and construction debris can damage equipment and are a safety hazard. Next time you're working on a project around your house or getting creative with crafts, be sure to place the wooden components in the garbage.



Takeaway coffee cups have a mixture of paper and plastic in their inner lining, designed to make them both heat and leak-proof. The plastic can't be recycled and the coffee residue in cups and k-cups contaminate other recyclable materials, making them better suited for the trash can.



Plastic bags can get tangled in machinery; they've even been known to shut down entire recycling facilities. Instead, take them back to a local grocer to be disposed of, and don't forget to unbag recyclables. Items should be loose in the bin.



Contamination is created when the wrong materials are put into the system, like food in the recycling bin, or when the right materials are prepared in the wrong way, such as when residue is left in containers. Always remember to empty, rinse, then recycle.