



Recycling Exists campaign – responses to common questions

I heard a very small percentage of plastics are recycled.

- Statistics stating that only a small percentage of plastic waste (5-9%) is recycled are taking into account all of the plastics generated. Many plastic items cannot be recycled. Here in the Twin Cities, you can be assured that the plastic items you put in your cart that are accepted in your program are getting recycled. This includes plastic bottles, containers, and jugs numbered 1, 2, or 5. Minnesota has a state law that requires the materials you put out for recycling get recycled. We are fortunate to have strong local and regional market for recycling, which means our recyclables are wanted by many companies in our state and across the country to make new products.
- While it's true that a relatively large amount of the total plastics manufactured worldwide are not recyclable, the ones you can recycle like water bottles, milk jugs and yogurt tubs do get recycled. Dem-Con Companies, located in Shakopee, is one of the largest facilities that accepts and sorts curbside recycling in the Twin Cities. According to Dem-Con, their facility has a 99% capture rate. This means if it's the right material for the recycling bin, it will get captured 99% of the time. About 10-12% of materials that arrive at their facility are not recyclable – meaning they should have never been in the bin. This includes plastics like shopping bags, toys and Styrofoam.
- We can be recycling more. Waste studies, such as waste sorts conducted by Hennepin County in 2016 and Minneapolis in 2022, have found that residents are only putting about half of what they could be into their recycling bins.
- Recycling, especially plastic recycling, isn't a perfect system, so we need to focus on waste prevention. Despite our strong recycling markets, many plastic items cannot yet be recycled. This includes single-use plastic utensils and straws, wrappers, and foam plastics. Additionally, many plastics that are recycled are turned into products that cannot be recycled again. That's why it's just as important to focus on preventing waste in the first place and avoiding unnecessary packaging and single-use products when possible.

What happens to our recycling?

- Plastics are sorted, shredded, melted into pellets and then sold to companies to make a variety of products. For example, Avon Plastics in Paynesville turns milk jugs and detergent bottles into durable decking, fencing and landscaping products. Plastics like drink bottles and produce containers get made into new bottles in Wisconsin and Ohio.
- Paper mills like West Rock in Saint Paul mix paper and water together to make a pulp, which is then flattened, dried and rolled into new boxboard. The boxboard is used to make cereal and cracker boxes.
- Milk and juice cartons are sent to Sustana Fiber in Wisconsin to make material for new paper products.
- Recycled food cans are transported by Minnesota companies like Miller Scrap and Disposal in Winona to foundries and steel mills throughout the Midwest. These cans are made into new products like wire, beams and parts for cars and appliances.
- Bottles and jars are sorted by color at Strategic Materials in Saint Paul. Clear glass is sent to Anchor Glass in Shakopee to make new food and beverage bottles.





Is our recycling shipped overseas?

- Minnesota has well-developed recycling infrastructure that we can all take pride in. Unlike on the coasts where recycling has relied heavily on international markets, recycling collected in the Twin Cities gets sorted, processed, and made into new items at local and regional facilities. There continues to be a demand for our recycled materials, and recyclers continue to invest in new technology to make recycling more advanced and efficient. Recycling is good for both our environment and the economy. Approximately 78,000 jobs in Minnesota are directly or indirectly supported by the recycling industry.
- According to Eureka Recycling, which sorts recycling from Minneapolis, Saint Paul and other Twin Cities communities at their facility in northeast Minneapolis, 74% of the material we processed stayed in Minnesota, 94% in the Midwest, and 98% stayed in the U.S.

Are there a lot of things that cannot be recycled in our recycling?

- Here in the Twin Cities, we generally do a good job of putting the right items in our cart for recycling. Twin Cities recycling facilities have some of the lowest rates of contamination (or materials that aren't accepted for recycling) in the nation.

Do I need to clean my container/jar before putting in the recycling?

- Empty containers and jars of any liquids and give them a quick rinse before recycling. They don't have to be perfectly clean, but rinse to remove much of the food residue!

