

## Recycling: Does It Still Matter?

Have you been hearing that recycled materials are being sent to the landfill? I know I've read some scary stories about recycled materials not having anywhere to be processed into new products. Materials without anywhere to go end up taking a long trip to the landfill after taking a pit stop at a recycling facility. Recycling facilities are called material recovery facilities or MRFs (sounds like "Smurfs" without the "S"). This long trip uses more fuel and energy than if the materials had been sent to the landfill in the first place, but does this mean we shouldn't recycle?

Not at all! The national news about recycled materials being sent to landfills are not necessarily the story in our communities. Large cities on the coasts have been struggling the longest to send their materials to be processed into new materials ever since China (once our biggest market) stopped buying our recycled materials. However, here in the Midwest, we were cushioned from the change in the market longest. Midwestern MRFs continue to sell their recycled materials to primarily domestic companies that wish to process the materials into new products. That's great news!

MRFs are no longer making as much money as they once did selling recycled materials, and this isn't as great of news. This means that recycling opportunities might become more expensive or more difficult to access. However, there are a few things you can do to help make recycling more affordable and easier to do.

1. Recycle **ONLY** what your recycler accepts.
  - a. Check out our website's recycling page to see what your hauler accepts and call our office or your hauler if you have any questions.
2. Ensure your recyclables are clean.
  - a. Contamination causes materials to be landfilled.
  - b. Make sure there is no food or grease on any of your recyclables.
  - c. If you store your paper/cardboard with your plastic/glass, make sure the plastic and glass are dry before you put them with the paper.
3. Call your garbage hauler and ask about curbside recycling.
  - a. Curbside recycling is really convenient, so if you have the option - try to take advantage of it!
4. Buy products made out of recycled materials.
  - a. Encourage companies to buy recycled materials by buying the products they're making out of recycled materials. Check out our recycling guide for a few examples and look to the internet for more examples!
5. Just keep recycling!
  - a. Recycling opportunities become more expensive or go away altogether when we stop recycling.

- b. If companies can't get enough recycled materials to make their new products, they start buying from MRFs further away from them or they move their company to where they can get materials. This causes an area to lose jobs and increases the cost of recycling because the recycled materials must be shipped further away to be sold.
- c. Even if recycling prices are going up now, if we keep at it, the market will improve once more infrastructure is in place in the United States to collect, sort, sell, and reuse recycled materials.