

Aspirational Recycling

Many of us try to recycle as much as possible – it's the Sierra Club way! In 2018 China stopped accepting much of our recycled materials, so you may have heard that much of what you put in your bins is now "wishful recycling". However, in the Capital District we are fortunate to have a decent recycling plant, and Steve Davis spoke with The Sierra Processing Plant (no relation to Sierra Club!) management to learn what each person can do to improve the recycling process. They indicated that locally, typically 80% of what is placed in the bins gets recycled. Compare this to national average of only 34% of what could be recycled actually is recycled.

Over Time, Things have Changed! Therefore, some of our practices are obsolete.

- ✓ Those #s on your plastics? Not as important as you think. What matter more is that the plastic is not flat; being 3D is important so that the machine sensors can distinguish it from flat, 2-D paper products. So keeping that lid on your bottles is actually helpful!
- ✓ Mixed materials? Still bad. Don't include containers such as the oatmeal contains that are mostly cardboard, but include some plastic and some metal. Don't recycle manila envelopes with bubble wrap lining. Don't recycle notebooks with the metal spiral bindings. However, it is okay to recycle cardboard boxes or envelopes with a small plastic view window; it's nice if you remove the plastic, but it's not required.
- ✓ How about greasy pizza boxes? Won't the grease ruin the batch? Not anymore! Go ahead and throw out greasy cardboard boxes! Go ahead recycle the peanut butter jars without having to scrub them thoroughly. Modern equipment will deal with it.
- ✓ What about the lids of tin cans? Yup, they are fine! Just please push them deep inside the can for safety.
- ✓ Orange juice or milk cartons? Aren't they bad because of plastic coating? Nope, the Sierra Representative indicated that those containers are made from virgin paper and because of this, they make an exception for the mixed materials request. But cat litter bags – not good, because they are too flat and will be diverted into the paper batch and ruin the batch. So ironically, buying cat litter in the plastic boxes is a better option for recycling.

Styrofoam vs. cardboard? Interestingly, per the Sierra Plant, the new paper "clam shells" used for restaurant leftovers are not recyclable but can be composted at home. Styrofoam peanuts, cups and clam shells for food are not accepted. In this area, we can in fact recycle styrofoam but only specifically the sturdy kind used as packaging material for a heavy item like a microwave. These can be dropped off at Shelter Enterprises Inc., 8 Saratoga St., Cohoes, Mon to Fri 8-2. They are a Styrofoam manufacturer and remanufacture the materials they collect.

Isn't glass better? According to the plant, glass is not a valuable recycling material these days because there are such limited markets for it, coupled with a very low tolerance for contaminants. Per the Plant, the main use of ground glass is to build the roads the garbage trucks use in the landfill. So when you buy your iced tea, choose a plastic bottle over glass, at least from the Sierra plant's point of view.

Plastic?! The plastic bag dilemma can be solved. These can be brought back to the supermarkets along with other basically clear bags like that extra layer that covers a loaf of bread, or even dry-cleaners wrapping. This becomes a revenue source for the stores so please do be sure to recycle there.

Finally, if you've taken one too many painful steps on to your kid's Leggos, DON'T try to recycle those. Donate them to a library or a shelter like St. Paul's Center for other kids to use. The recycling plant can't manage small plastic items like Leggos or loose bottle caps because they jam the machines. If all this has given you a headache, keep in mind curbside pick-up will recycle your empty pill bottles.

Let's celebrate that we are doing our part. If you have a party celebration, remember no plastic tablecloths, no paper napkins, and no disposable "paper" cups can be recycled. So do it the old fashion way, use paper table cloths and wash real cups! Your friends are worth it! The planet is worth it!

Want to SEE RECYCLING HAPPENING? Please sign up for a tour of the Recycling Plant, scheduled for Friday, June 28th at 1:00 pm. Bring the kids! Contact Steve Davis at Sdavis@realtyforcause.com .