

# Recycling



When you total up all the paper, plastic, aluminum and glass, Hennepin County recycles 580,000 tons each year. All of that recycling makes a big difference. By choosing to recycle, we reduce our consumption of fossil fuels, create jobs, conserve natural resources and protect the environment. Plus, recycling is simple, convenient and something the entire family can help with. However, we can still do more to recycle everything we can everywhere we go by brushing up on what items go in the recycling bin and learning about the recycling process.

## Why recycle?

### Recycling saves energy

Manufacturing products from recycled materials uses far less energy than manufacturing the same product from virgin (new) materials. It takes 90 percent less energy to manufacture an aluminum can from recycled aluminum, about 50 percent less energy to manufacture a glass bottle from recycled glass, and about 75 percent less energy to manufacture paper from recycled paper. Recycling decreases our demand for fossil fuels.

### Recycling benefits the economy

Recycling helps support local markets and businesses statewide. Approximately 37,000 jobs in Minnesota are directly or indirectly supported by the recycling industry. These jobs pay an estimated \$2 billion in wages and add \$8.5 billion to Minnesota's economy.

Additionally, recyclable material has tremendous economic value. In 2010, Minnesota recycling programs collected approximately 2.5 million tons of material worth \$690 million. We lose money when we don't recycle. About one million tons of recyclable material is thrown away each year. That material, if recycled, would be worth about \$217 million to the state's economy; instead, it costs more than \$200 million to send the material to landfills.

### Recycling protects the environment

By reducing energy use, recycling decreases greenhouse gas emissions. The amount of material recycled in Minnesota annually reduces greenhouse gas emissions equal to taking 1.3 million cars off the road. By conserving natural resources, recycling has indirect benefits to climate change as well. Take paper recycling, for instance. Each mature tree we don't cut down can filter up to 60 pounds of pollutants and carbon dioxide out of our air each year.

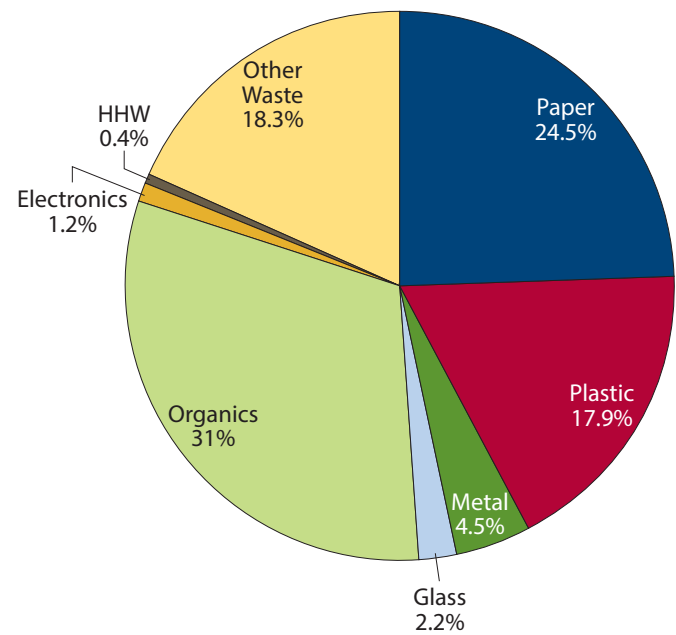
Recycling and buying recycled products also helps keep Minnesota's air and water clean as manufacturing products from recycled materials generates significantly less air and water pollution than manufacturing from virgin materials. Manufacturing recycled white office paper creates 74 percent less air pollutants and 35 percent less water pollutants than making it from virgin wood pulp.

## We can recycle more

About 1.35 million tons of solid waste was generated in Hennepin County in 2015, which is nearly 34,000 tons less than 2014. Recycling increased to 43 percent in 2015. This is an increase of 2 percent compared to 2014, with 9,000 more tons of material recycled. The 2015 results continue the trend of small but consistent annual increases since 2010 when the recycling rate was 38 percent. However, this is 2 percent short of the 2015 goal of recycling 45 percent of waste generated. A lot of recyclable material, especially paper and plastic, still ends up in the trash. Everyone can help increase recycling by knowing what can be recycled and recycling everywhere they go, including at home, at work, at school, at events, while traveling and on-the-go.

### What's in the trash?

#### Residential waste composition



## What can I recycle?

From glass and metal to plastics, cartons and paper, you can recycle a wide variety of materials. The following is a list of materials that are accepted in all communities in Hennepin County. Some cities or haulers may accept more materials than what is on this list. Contact for your city recycling coordinator or hauler for information for your specific program. Find city recycling contacts at [www.hennepin.us/recycling](http://www.hennepin.us/recycling).

### Paper

- Mail, office and school papers
- Magazines and catalogs
- Newspapers and inserts
- Phone books



### Boxes:

- Cardboard
- Cereal and cracker boxes
- Shoe boxes, gift boxes and electronics boxes
- Toothpaste, medication and other toiletry boxes



### Cartons

- Milk cartons
- Juice boxes
- Soup, broth and wine cartons

### Glass

- Food and beverage bottles and jars



### Plastic

#### Bottles and jugs:

- Water, soda and juice bottles
- Milk and juice jugs
- Ketchup and salad dressing bottles
- Dishwashing liquid bottles and detergent jugs
- Shampoo, soap and lotion bottles



#### Cups and containers:

- Yogurt, pudding and fruit cups
- Disposable cups and bowls
- Margarine, cottage cheese, and other containers
- Produce, deli and takeout containers

#### Packaging:

- Clear packaging from toys and electronics

### Metal

- Food and beverage cans



## Tips for recycling at home

### Collect recycling throughout your home

People are generally pretty good at collecting the recycling they generate in the kitchen but often overlook recycling generated in other areas of the home.

Remember to recycle items from:

- The bathroom, including shampoo, soap and lotion bottles and boxes from toothpaste, medications and other toiletries.
- The laundry room, including laundry detergent jugs and boxes from dryer sheets.
- The office, including office paper, mail, newspapers and magazines.

### Recycle more materials

People may also be unaware that more materials are now accepted for recycling. Materials that have been added to recycling programs recently include:

- Cartons, including milk, juice, soup or broth cartons as well as juice boxes.
- Plastic cups and containers such as yogurt cups or sour cream tubs.
- Plastic produce and deli containers or take-out containers.
- Plastic packaging from electronics and toys.

**Don't recycle:** Styrofoam™, plastic wrap, microwaveable food trays, paper soiled with food, paper plates and towels, drinking glasses, dishes, mirrors and containers that held hazardous products.

## Recycling FAQs

The following are answers to frequently asked recycling questions.

### **My recycling is picked up every other week, and my recycling cart is overflowing. Why don't they pick my recycling up every week?**

If you want to request that your recycling is collected more often, contact your city recycling coordinator and/or recycling hauler. But be aware that moving to weekly recycling pickup isn't necessarily the best solution. Picking up recycling weekly means more trucks on the roads and more emissions. It would also make recycling more costly.

You can typically get a second cart or a larger bin – contact your city recycling coordinator or hauler to request one. Also think about what you have in your recycling. Could you make more space in your bin by condensing your recycling? Try collapsing cardboard boxes, crushing cans, bottles, or cartons etc. Finally, you may want to consider why you're generating so much recycling. Is there waste that could be reduced or eliminated?

### **What should I do with caps and lids?**

Leave plastic lids on to prevent them from falling through the gaps at the recycling sorting facility. This applies to plastic bottles, jugs, cups, containers, and cartons.

Remove caps and lids from glass bottles and jars. You can collect metal caps in a metal can (such as a soup can). Squeeze the can shut before recycling to prevent the caps from falling through the gaps at the recycling facility.

### **Can I recycle pizza boxes?**

No. Pizza boxes are not accepted for recycling because they are almost always contaminated with grease and oil. Food is one of the worst contaminants in the paper recycling process because it can ruin entire batches of recycled paper, costing the industry \$700 million per year. If you do recycle your pizza boxes, make absolutely sure the entire box is grease-free. Cut or tear out the soiled portions of your pizza boxes put them in the trash.

### **Can I recycle plastic bags?**

Check with your hauler. Republic Waste Services accepts retail plastic bags as long as you put all plastic bags together in one plastic bag before placing in the recycling cart. Waste Management, Randy's and most other haulers do not accept plastic bags. Check with your hauler or city for guidelines for guidelines specific to your recycling service.

Plastic bags cause problems at the recycling sorting facilities because they become wrapped around moving

parts and interfere with equipment. The good news is that many retail and grocery stores accept plastic bags. The county drop-off facilities accept plastic bags as well.

### **Can I recycle refrigerated and frozen food boxes?**

Milk cartons and juice boxes can be recycled. Soup, broth, and wine cartons can, too. Thanks to new technology at paper mills the valuable, high-quality paper in cartons can be separated from the unwanted layers of plastic and aluminum. Check with your hauler for details on other items, such as pop and beer cartons and refrigerated food boxes.

Frozen food boxes and ice cream cartons are typically not accepted because plastic is incorporated into the matrix of the paper during manufacturing. This added plastic helps protect food from freezer burn and ensures that the paper container won't get soggy.

### **What do the numbers on plastics tell me about recycling?**

The numbers on plastics are called Resin Identification Codes and let you know what type of plastic the items is made of. The symbol does not mean the item is recyclable. For example, both shampoo bottles and plastic bags may be #2 plastics, but their recyclability varies.

To crack the recycling code, it's best to use descriptions of the materials (bottles, cups, containers, etc.), images and the numbers to determine what is recyclable.

### **How clean do my recyclables need to be?**

Cleaner is better. Rinse cans, bottles and jars to remove food residue. Here are some additional pointers for preparing recyclables:

- Leave plastic caps and lids on
- Remove lids from glass jars
- Flatten boxes
- Remove pumps from spray bottles
- Do not place recyclables in plastic bags

### **What should I do with confidential paper?**

Confidential paper can be recycled. Your confidential papers are no safer in the garbage than in the recycling, but proper preparation is important. It's a good idea to shred paper with financial information or other sensitive personal information to prevent identity theft. Place the shredded paper in a brown paper bag, staple it shut, and put it in your curbside recycling cart.

### **Can I recycle egg cartons?**

It depends on what type of egg carton it is. Paper egg

cartons cannot be recycled because the paper fiber in egg cartons has been recycled too often and is too short to be recycled again. However, they are great to use in compost. If the egg carton is Styrofoam™ or #6 polystyrene, it goes in the trash. If the egg carton is a clear #1 plastic, it can be recycled.

### **I'm confused about plastics. What should I do with Styrofoam™, flower and garden pots, and larger items such as my laundry basket?**

Styrofoam™ should be placed in the garbage. Examples include Styrofoam™ cups, plates, bowls, take-out containers, egg cartons, mushroom containers, and all other expanded polystyrene foam products. These items may be labeled as #6 plastic. As a general rule, #6 plastics are not accepted for recycling. There are very few viable, cost-effective markets currently available for this material. Transportation costs are prohibitive and it contaminates other materials, not to mention the litter impact. It's best to avoid Styrofoam™.

Ask your city or hauler about flower and garden pots. Some haulers accept them, and some do not. If they are accepted, make sure to clean out any remaining dirt. Also check with your city or hauler about options for other rigid plastics such as laundry baskets.

## The recycling process

Many people wonder what happens to their recycling after it leaves the curb, especially because most recycling is now collected in a single-sort system in which all recycling is placed into one bin or cart.

The materials that people recycle are put to good use by being manufactured into new products.

The recycling process includes four main steps:

1. Separation and collection
2. Processing
3. Marketing and manufacturing
4. Purchasing recycled materials

Recycling starts at the curb with source separation and collection, which means recyclables need to be separate from trash when they are picked up from homes and businesses.

The next step is processing, which is when waste haulers bring the collected recyclables to materials recovery facilities (MRFs) to be sorted, graded, cleaned and prepared for markets. Materials are sorted to remove contaminants

that may damage processing equipment and graded to reclaim higher-value materials. Various methods are used at MRFs to sort materials. Mechanical processes such as magnets, air jets and screens sort materials by taking advantage of the physical differences among materials, such as weight or magnetism. Hand-sorting is used to sort materials that the mechanical methods cannot.

After the recyclables are processed at the MRF, the materials are sold to manufacturers that make them into a wide variety of new products.

- Paper is turned into pulp by being mixed with water and heated at a paper mill. It is then recycled back into paper, newspaper, boxes, napkins, paper towels, egg cartons and more.
- Cartons are sent to a paper mill where the pulping process separates the valuable paper from the plastic or foil lining.
- Glass is crushed, heated and recycled into glass bottles and jars or used in insulation, floor tile, road construction projects and more.
- Steel or aluminum is heated, melted and recycled back into steel or aluminum cans.
- Plastics are shredded, melted and recycled into a variety of products, including plastic bottles, carpet, furniture, clothing and more.

The final step in the recycling process is closing the recycling loop by buying products made from recycled materials.



## Close the recycling loop: buy recycled

Consumers are an important part in making recycling work because purchases send a message to manufactures that recycled products are valued. When you're out shopping, help close the recycling loop by purchasing items made from recycled materials. Look on product labels for words like: *this item is made from recycled materials*, *made from post consumer content*, or *made from reclaimed materials*.

## Resources

[www.hennepin.us/recycling](http://www.hennepin.us/recycling)

Information about what you can recycle, links to additional recycling and waste reduction services, and resources for apartment and condominium recycling.

[www.RethinkRecycling.com](http://www.RethinkRecycling.com)

Your go-to guide for waste and recycling in the Twin Cities. Includes a residential recycling guide with information on what you can recycle, recycling drop-off locations, and information about reducing and reusing.