

# ELLENSBURG CURBSIDE RECYCLING

## ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

### Q: Why have recycling rules changed?

- Most recycling rules haven't changed. You can still recycle common household items like bottles, cans, paper and cardboard.
- However, it has become increasingly important that you **ONLY** place approved recyclables into your recycling cart. All non-approved items are contamination. If a load of recycling contains non-recyclables, even by just a fraction – that entire load risks not being recycled. That's according to new guidelines being enforced by domestic and international recycling mills.
- Waste Management's updated solid waste service was sent to each residential garbage and recycling subscriber in mid-September. That guide has the most up to date list of items accepted in the curbside recycling program. The Guide may also be found at [www.wmnorthwest.com/ellensburg](http://www.wmnorthwest.com/ellensburg).
- **The big change is glass is no longer accepted. Effective October 1,** Waste Management is removing glass from the list of acceptable recyclables for the Ellensburg curbside recycling program. Kittitas County will also stop accepting glass as recyclable at the local transfer stations.
- Glass has been an ongoing challenge for recyclers across the U.S. and is no longer accepted in your curbside cart for a variety of reasons:
  - Glass is very low in value because it competes with an abundant and inexpensive raw resource (sand). The industries that have historically purchased recycled glass include the bottling and insulation industry. Both have decreased their demand due to inexpensive raw resources (sand) and low energy rates.
  - Glass is expensive to collect, process and transport. Glass is hard on equipment.
  - In 2019 the Washington Association of Counties Solid Waste Managers recommended removing glass from the list of core recyclables. After substantial evaluation, many counties and third party drop off locations are no longer accepting glass.

- If there are no third-party drop off locations, you will have to place glass in your curbside garbage container.

### Q: How can I tell what is and isn't acceptable in my recycling container?

- We want to make recycling less complicated! Remember these 3 rules to make recycling simple:
  1. Recycle empty bottles, cans, paper and cardboard
  2. Keep foods and liquids out of the recycling
  3. Keep plastic bags out of the recycling bin. No bagged recyclables.
- And remember, you should never place an item in your recycling cart if you're not sure it's an approved recyclable. When in doubt – throw it out.
- WM will place a new recyclables decal on your residential recycle cart by October 1. The photos on your cart decal are the items allowed in your cart.
- You can help keep recycling free from contamination by only recycling approved materials. It's easy! Visit our recycling education website [www.wmnorthwest.com](http://www.wmnorthwest.com). Look for Ellensburg in the drop-down menu.

## ALL THINGS PLASTIC

### Plastics (#1-7) & the Recycling Symbol

Q: What number plastics (#1-7) do you accept? / If something has a recycling symbol can I put it in my cart?

- Recycle plastics by shape, not by number!
- The numbers and Mobius (chasing arrow recycling symbol) on plastics are tricky, because they can mean different things. The Federal Trade Commission requires that a product have at least 60% access to local programs (like Material Recovery Facility processing) across the U.S. to include the Mobius on their products. However, the Mobius is not a reliable indicator of whether something is accepted in a local recycling program.
- Plus, the number on plastics only indicates the primary plastic ingredient in the recipe. There are thousands of plastic products and packaging, and each has a unique chemical recipe. Many combinations cannot be recycled into new products.

- Those are some reasons we've been looking for a simpler way to promote which materials are recyclable. **One of the easiest methods is to recycle plastics by shape: bottles, jars and jugs. If it's not one of these shapes, it's not accepted in your curbside recycling container.**

### Other Plastic Objects (e.g. toys, lawn furniture, kiddie pools, etc.)

Q: What about other plastics like toys, lawn furniture and kiddie pools?

- No, these rigid plastic items (like toys, lawn furniture, kiddie pools, etc.) are not accepted as curbside recycling.
- Not everything that is plastic is recyclable in your curbside cart. The easiest thing to remember with plastics – is to recycle only food and beverage bottle and jugs.
- Just because an item is made from plastic or contains plastic parts, doesn't mean recycling facilities can handle it or that the item can even be recycled.

### Plastic Bags

Q: Are plastic bags recyclable? / Why can't I put plastic bags in my recycling cart?

- Plastic bags are NOT accepted as part of our curbside recycling collection program. Plastic bags cause damage to automated recycling equipment – they get caught in processing machinery. Each time plastic bags become tangled in machinery, the entire plant shuts down and our employees manually climb into equipment and cut out plastic bags. Ultimately, plastic bags create a hazard for recycling workers and make recycling plants less efficient – therefore, we cannot accept plastic bags in the recycling.
- However, clean and dry plastic bags can be recycled at many local retailers – just not in your home or business recycling container.
- Visit [plasticfilmrecycling.org](http://plasticfilmrecycling.org) to find a take-back location near you.
- Plastic bags are not accepted at the curb video - <https://youtu.be/20iOk-YYuB4>

Q: Why can't I place bagged recyclables into my cart/container?

- All your diligent recycling work may be going to waste if you are putting recyclables in plastic bags. Because of health and safety concerns, plastic bags will not be opened, and the materials inside will be sent to the trash.
- Please, **never bag your recycling – keep them loose in your container!**
- For tips on how to collect your recyclables without using plastic liners, please check out this short educational video: <https://youtu.be/1peXqzvECLQ>

Q: Can I bag my recyclables in clear plastic bags – that way you can see they're recyclables?

- No, all recyclables must go into your cart or container loose. **No bagged recyclables, please!**
- Because of health and safety concerns, plastic bags will not be opened, and the materials inside will be sent to the trash. **Never bag your recycling – keep them loose in your container!**
- **Special note for Commercial Customers:** Please speak with your janitorial team about this topic. Often, they can easily eliminate lining your indoor recycling containers all together. Or, if liners are needed to transport recyclables to the outdoor container, please make sure the bags of recyclables are opened and emptied into the recycling container loose. The used liners can then be reused if they're in good shape or thrown in the trash.

## IS THIS RECYCLABLE?

### Glass

Q: Can I recycle glass in the WM's Ellensburg Curbside Recycling Program?

- No, glass is no longer accepted.
- Why? We understand your frustration! Glass is considered a “marginal material” because there's no glass market in the region at this time. Currently, the glass collected in regional recycling programs is not being remanufactured into new glass. It is being reused beneficially, as an alternative to rock and road base at a nearby Waste Management facility.
- There's no stable, long-term demand for glass from Central and Eastern Washington. Instead, glass received at WM's Spokane recyclables sorting facility goes to beneficial use. It is crushed and used as a substitute for road base. There is an oversupply of glass. Recognizing that glass is not actually recycled at this time, WM in collaboration with local jurisdictions is removing glass from the list of acceptable recyclables in this area.
- Many cities are discontinuing the collection of glass for many reasons:
  - Glass is low in value because it competes with an abundant and inexpensive raw resource (sand). The industries that have historically purchased recycled glass include the bottling and insulation industry. Both have decreased their demand due to inexpensive raw resources (sand) and low energy rates.

## Shredded Paper

Q: Can I recycle shredded paper?

- No, shredded paper is NOT accepted in the City of Ellensburg recycling program.
- Why? Paper consists of fibers. The longer the fiber, the more valuable the paper is during the recycling process. When paper is shredded, the fibers become shorter and must be downcycled into tissue or toilet paper – for which there is much less demand. And tiny pieces of shredded paper can easily cross-contaminate and devalue other recyclables during the sorting process.
- Luckily, there are alternatives for shredded paper. Shredded paper is a great addition to your compost pile if it does not contain cellulose material (like windowed envelopes). Alternatively, it may be bagged and disposed of in your trash.

## Bottle Caps & Other Lids

Q: What should I do with bottle caps and other lids?

- Please remove your plastic bottle caps and all other lids before recycling plastic water bottles and other types of plastic containers. Some lids are so small they slip through the cracks of recycling equipment and jam up the machinery. And some plastic caps are made of a different plastic than the bottle – making it difficult to them recycle together. **Please place all caps and lids in the trash.**

## Frozen Food Boxes & Other Waxed Cardboards

Q: Can I recycle frozen food boxes and other waxed cardboard?

- Frozen food boxes, and other items with a similar waxy, water resistant finish, should not be placed in curbside recycling. While they look like other paperboard items such as cereal boxes, they are coated with a thin layer of polyethylene (to protect from freezer burn) that makes them different. If they get processed with the other paperboard products, that paper material can become contaminated by the plastic. Please place them in the trash.