

# Anti-Contamination Recycling Kit

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Improving Quality in Your Recycling Program

If you are looking to clean up your residential recycling stream, this kit might be for you. As you will see, the approach is well tested and the results are both immediate and noteworthy.

This kit has been designed to provide steps, tools, and resources to help you improve the quality of your recycling program. It will require resources, planning, and time on your end, as well as a partnership with your MRF and hauler, but the benefits are many. Increasing the quality of the recycling stream can save on disposal fees, improve resident satisfaction with your program, and ensures the success and sustainability of the recycling system.

To get started, use this [ASSESSMENT TOOL](#) to make sure your community is ready to take on this challenge. Before starting this project you'll need to assess your budget, present your case to decision makers, and get buy-in from your city/town officials, your hauler and your MRF. Lastly, take advantage of what others have learned by reviewing this [PRO TIPS PAGE](#).

CURBSIDE



**This toolkit includes:**

- Guidance to help you broach this subject with your MRF and hauler
- Visual instructions and tools for targeted messages
- Tips to help you get the best results
- Tools to help you track and report results



This Kit was developed in collaboration with  
Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

# KICK-START IMPROVED RECYCLING

This is not your typical education and outreach campaign. The tools in this kit were developed, tested, and refined in partnership with communities, states and other organizations across the country. It focuses on dual, complementary strategies: education and direct feedback at the curb.

Proven results from implementation of this kit have included:



Overall contamination trended **downward**.

The most problematic contaminant, which was specifically targeted, trended **downward**.

The number of contaminated carts notably **decreased** over the life of the program.

While it might be tempting to implement only a portion of this kit, success hinges on implementing the entire approach. Why? As an example, in 2016 we deployed only the education component in one community and saw no significant changes to overall contamination or the specifically targeted issue (bagged recyclables) in that community. This supports our belief that combining education and direct feedback at the curb is a best practice and will more likely achieve the best outcomes.

Implementing this kit will not only help kick-start a better quality material stream, it will allow you to isolate problem areas on your routes and target the carts that need attention. It provides a process to address the problem materials that create inefficiencies and added expenses in your program.

## TIP

Some communities are concerned that telling residents “no” will result in a significant number of complaints from residents. Participating communities in 2016 and 2017 did not report this as an issue.

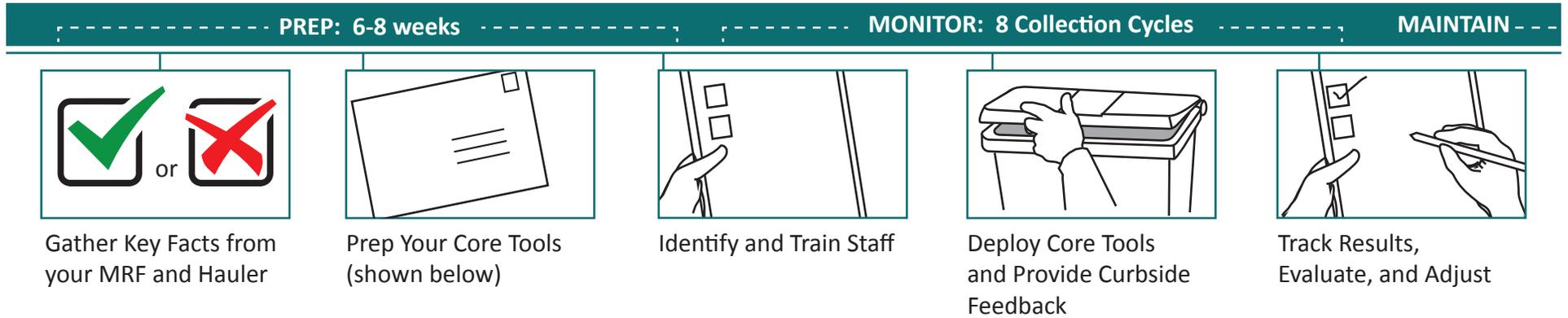
**ARE YOU READY?** Use this **ASSESSMENT TOOL** to make sure your community is ready for the fight against contamination.

**ASSESSMENT TOOL**

click **LINKS**  
for related documents

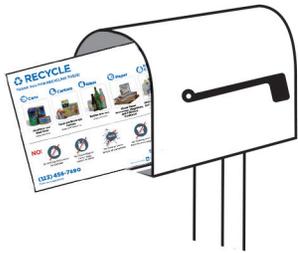
# QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: IMPROVING QUALITY

Surveys show that most residents want to recycle right, but when tested, they don't actually know how. Use this kit and **CHECKLIST** to help recyclers do the right thing.



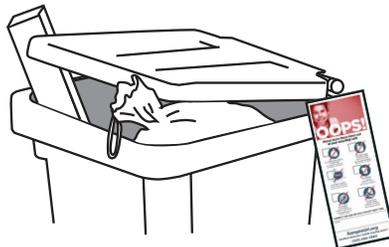
## CORE TOOLS

Consistent messaging and direct feedback encourage better recycling.



### ANNUAL INFO CARD

Residents need to know what you want, as well as what you don't. Mail this ANNUAL INFO CARD to give them an easy reference guide to your basic YES and NO lists.



### CURBSIDE FEEDBACK

Direct feedback is extremely powerful in changing behavior. Train staff to use OOPS tags.



### TOP ISSUE MAILER

Target your most problematic contaminant by mailing residents this issue-specific card two collection cycles after the ANNUAL INFO CARD.



### TOP ISSUE SIGNAGE

Post signage in the community to reinforce the message from the TOP ISSUE MAILER.

## → STEP 1 GATHER THE FACTS FROM YOUR MRF and HAULER

Open lines of communication with your MRF and hauler are critical. Speak with them to find out the biggest problem materials in your recycling stream.



### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

CONTRACT  
CONSIDERATIONS

MRF SURVEY

WORKSHEETS

- Your recycling hauler contract
- Your MRF contract (if separate from hauling)

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

Set up a meeting with your MRF and hauler. Use these [WORKSHEETS](#) to guide discussions and set the work plan.

- Use this [MRF SURVEY](#) to guide your discussion and narrow down the top five problem materials. (You'll highlight these in many of your communications tools.) This is also a good time to verify that the MRF accepts the items listed on your current outreach materials.
- Name the top contaminant. This will become the central focus of your work to improve quality.
- Ask the MRF to periodically assess your contamination rate. You will need to agree on the assessment method and the frequency. Get a baseline contamination rate so you can measure against it later and track your progress. ([See Step 5 – Track Results, Evaluate and Adjust](#))
- Ask your hauler and MRF to help identify your most problematic routes in terms of contamination. Generally, 20% of your routes are likely creating the most issues.
- Identify what your hauler can and cannot do to assist with the effort.

### TIP

Review your hauler and MRF contracts for relevant clauses. Material audits, education, and enforcement may already be built in for you to implement. Further, keep these [CONTRACT CONSIDERATIONS](#) in mind when your current contracts are up for renewal. Remember, written contracts are a fundamental best practice.

## → STEP 2 PREPARE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

You've named your top contaminants. Now it's time to prep, print, and prepare to post.



### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- List of routes with the most contamination.
- Mailing addresses for every household you service on those routes.
- Your logo and preferred contact information.

ARTWORK

CHECKLIST

### TIP

Your hauler or drivers should be able to identify worst routes without any research. If not, plan for 20 percent of your routes to be on this list.

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

A consistent and clear message is important to ensure everyone across the Commonwealth understands their job as recyclers. Download **ARTWORK**. Consider bilingual messaging.



**Annual info card mailer.** Verify that the acceptable materials and top contaminants are accurate (or make adjustments), then print and mail these cards to every household on your most contaminated routes. Your GIS or Planning Department should be able to provide you with mailing addresses, and the local post office or your printer might be able to help through specific mail carrier routes.



**Curbside feedback.** Print Oops Tags to use on those routes. Make sure the top contaminants are clearly represented. Print enough for 1.5 times the number of households on the target routes. (For example, if there are 1,000 households on a target route, print 1,500 tags for that route.)



**Top issue mailer.** Prepare mailer. Distribute two collection cycles after the annual info card mailer goes out.



**Top issue signage.** Support the top issue mailer with these reminders, which you should put out when the mailers are sent and leave out for at least 6 collection cycles. A-frames, billboards, bus ads, and posters at local stores all work well, as do social media posts and ads.

## → STEP 2 PREPARE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS



### TIP

Refer to the **CHECKLIST** often, to insure you are maintaining your timeline.

**Budget for deploying core tools** – annual info card mailer, curbside feedback (including staffing), top issue mailer, and top issue signage. Speak to your local printer for an estimate of costs.

See **Step 3** for more on staffing.

### Best Practices –

For a successful and sustainable program, your messaging must continue beyond this program. Consider adopting these best practices:

**Website.** It's likely that most residents visiting your website are looking for information on how to properly handle a particular item. Providing easy search functions for that information will help ensure that item does not become contamination. Or, consider adding an image of your annual info card to your website. Consult with your MRF to ensure accuracy.

**Social Media.** Make use of social media and your website to remind your community how to recycle better. Look to ItsAllYou.org, and The Recycling Partnership's social media kit for ideas.

## → STEP 3 IDENTIFY and TRAIN STAFF

Resident education alone will not improve your recycling stream. Curbside feedback is key to improving quality because it reinforces the rules and helps recyclers know what they are doing wrong... and right!



### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A meeting with your hauler.
- Staff to tip cart lids or peer into bins and tag.
- A training session for those staff.
- Standard Operating Procedures

SOPs

- Computer or TV suitable for showing the

TRAINING VIDEO

### TIP

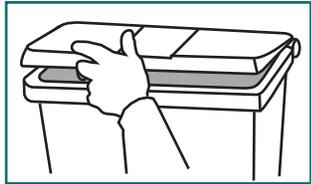
Work with your hauler to get them involved. Chances are that drivers already know which households are the worst offenders. Closely examine your hauler contract, looking for anything about educating or enforcing.

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

- a First, develop a strategy and discuss with your hauler. Will you be rejecting carts the first time you tag them? The second time? How far is your municipality willing to go to enforce? Will you use Thank You Tags for those who fix the problem?
- b You'll need staff (aka Quality Inspectors) to tip cart lids or bins and tag for the items listed on your Oops Tags. To save on labor expenses, look to existing staff, volunteers, and your hauler first, followed by temp workers. Estimate 5 to 8 hours for one staffer to cover a standard 1,000 household curbside route.
- c Use this [TRAINING VIDEO](#) to train staff and drivers on procedures. Be sure to set a standard for rejecting carts – do you draw the line at a single contaminant, or does it take a more notable amount? Also, decide when and how you will use Thank You tags. Consistency is the key. As a best practice, complete at least one walk through of each target route with all Quality Inspectors for training purposes.
- d Set procedures for staff to use Oops Tags at the curb. Here are some simple [SOPs](#) (Standard Operating Procedures) to help guide your team through easy-to-follow steps used by successful programs across the country. Beyond these, factor in community and route specifics.
- e Explore the possibility of your hauler fulfilling these duties, either now or once your contamination rate is under control. They could even play the role of backup, looking for anything that other quality inspectors missed. At the very least, drivers should leave rejected carts at the curb.

## → STEP 4 DEPLOY CORE TOOLS

This toolkit is designed to help you give recycling the equivalent of a pool shock – hit it hard with everything you’ve got to clean the system. Keep it up for at least eight collection cycles, then scale back to a less intense quality control program to maintain results.



### WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- Prelaunch meetings with hauler, MRF, and internal staff.

### TIP

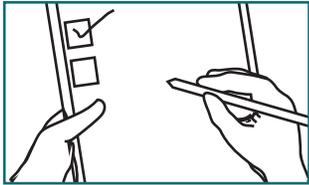
For mailings, talk to your local post office about door-to-door distribution. Postal staff may have options to reduce costs, and this will help ensure that your mailing gets to all households.

### WHAT YOU’LL DO

- a Double check that your mailers are correct, orders have been placed, and your staff has been trained.
- b Tell your hauler and MRF your start date so that everyone is aware that you are ready to launch.
- c Inform decision makers and frontline staff, and anyone else who may interact with residents about the details of this program, in case there are any questions from residents. In addition, give them a specific answer to “Why is the city doing this?” That answer is “To protect the health and safety of workers and the recycling system.”
- d Launch.
- e Prepare for the next phase – program maintenance – which should include continued dialogue with your MRF and hauler, regularly spot checking recycling containers, and semi-annual communication with residents about the most problematic materials.

## → STEP 5 TRACK RESULTS, EVALUATE, and ADJUST

There's only one way to measure success, and that is to collect accurate data.



### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A spreadsheet, notebook, app, or other means of recording data.
- Clickers, tally counters, or tracking app.

MRF TRACKING FORM

SET-OUT VIDEO

TALLY SHEET

### TIP

A capture rate study will help you identify how much trash is in your recycling, and how much recycling is in your trash. This is the best way to measure your progress and find opportunities for improvement. You can do your own study by taking 50 trash and recycling containers at random, sorting and weighing the contents, and doing the math. Or you can hire a specialized firm to do it.

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

Track these basic metrics to monitor the effects of this program.

**Contamination rate:** Work with your MRF to get this on a regular basis. Use this [MRF TRACKING FORM](#) and protocol.

**Curbside set-out rate:** On each route, capture set-out rates (the number of households actually setting out recycling on a collection day divided by the total number of serviced households on that route). [SEE SET-OUT VIDEO](#)

**Curbside tagging rate:** On each route, record the number of Oops Tags you leave, as well as the number of households that receive Thank You Tags for fixing their recycling. Customize this [TALLY SHEET](#) to capture all of the pertinent details.

You can track these on paper and clip board, or consider using a phone or tablet based App — several are commercially available.

### NOTE

If a specific route is consistently producing lots of contamination, look for clues in the field. For example, some cities have discovered some trash and recycling have ended up in the same truck. In Memphis, their contamination team realized several households had broken trash carts and were using recycling carts instead. Watch, listen, learn, and act.

## → ANTI-CONTAMINATION KIT – QUICK LINKS

### ARTWORK

Design files for both the CORE TOOLS and general promotion tools.

### MRF SURVEY

Start improving quality by working with your MRF to identify issues and goals.

### SOPs

Standard Operating Procedures lay out the roles, responsibilities, timeline and tracking.

### ASSESSMENT TOOL

Are you ready to improve the quality of your recycling?

### MRF TRACKING FORM

Track contamination metrics.

### TALLY SHEET

Track tagging to track progress.

### CHECKLIST

Put the plan and the components to work.

### PRO TIPS

Advice from other communities that have run this program.

### TRAINING VIDEO

Use this videos to get drivers and enforcement staff ready to provide curbside feedback.

### CONTRACT CONSIDERATIONS

Tips for smart curbside contracts.

### SET-OUT VIDEO

Overview of the difference between set -out rate and participation rate and how to calculate.

### WORKSHEETS

Use these worksheets to define the project scope of work.