

Anti-Contamination Recycling Kit

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Improving Quality in Your Recycling Program

A Step-By-Step Guide

We know that many communities utilize drop-off sites for dual- and single-stream recycling programs where curbside collection isn't always available. These locations are important for community participation and play a huge role in the volume and quality of the local recycling stream.

That's why we've created this kit for drop-off sites. Implementing this kit will help kick-start a better quality material stream, providing clarity and a more user-friendly experience for your residents. It will require resources, planning, and time on your end, as well as a partnership with your materials recovery facility (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 FORM** 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 MRF.

DROP-OFF



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
- Quick links to resource documents



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. This program calls for:

- face-to-face interaction with residents at the site,
- clear and consistent signage for collection containers, and
- direct messaging to target the top contaminant.

Proven results from implementation of this kit have included:

- decreased overall contamination
- decreased occurrences of the most problematic contaminant

53%



In one Massachusetts community, the specifically targeted contaminants – recyclables in bags and refuse in bags – decreased from 94 percent of the contamination by weight to only 53 percent of the contamination by weight, substantially reducing the overall contamination.

TIP

Some communities are concerned that saying “no” to certain items would discourage recycling. However, where this kit has been deployed:

- customer traffic stayed consistent.
- users of the site were pleased with the upgraded signage.
- site managers expressed that the program was worth the effort.

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

ASSESSMENT FORM



click [LINKS](#)
for related documents

→ 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:

WORKSHEETS

MRF SURVEY

CONTRACT
CONSIDERATIONS

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

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.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

- 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. *Use data in Step 5 to track results, evaluate and adjust.*
- The Recycling Partnership strongly recommends you track your contamination and program performance data using the Municipal Measurement Program, or MMP, as a way to see trends year-over-year. Learn more at <https://recyclesearch.com/profile/mmp>.



→ 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:

ARTWORK

CHECKLIST

BUDGET

- Mailing addresses for every household eligible to use the site.
- Your logo and preferred contact information.
- Your budget.

NOTE

Each of these tactics serves a specific purpose, but you might have access to similar approaches more fitting for your community. Consider all of the resources you have to make this program effective in your community.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

A consistent and clear message is important to ensure everyone understands their job as recyclers. Download **ARTWORK** and use the **CAMPAIGN BUILDER**.



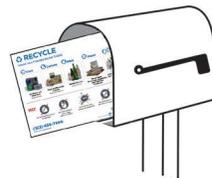
Assess and update site signage. Look at your site with fresh eyes. Is your signage clear and concise, or overly detailed? Is your site cluttered with signs? Consider updating your signage with clear messaging before starting this program.



In-person feedback plus info handout. Print handouts for on-site staff to start the conversation with residents. Be sure your staff is well-versed in the specifics of the new messaging. Make sure the top contaminants are clearly represented.



Top issue signage. Post eye-catching temporary signage about the top issue at your site, and leave it out for 6 to 8 weeks. A-frames work well for this, and because you can switch out messaging at a very low cost they pay dividends for years to come.



Annual info card/promotion. Verify that the acceptable materials and top contaminants are accurate. If your budget allows, print and mail cards to every household at the start of this program. (This will help build participation as well as inform on do's and don'ts. While this tactic is strongly recommended, it is optional based on your goals and budget.) To save money in the budget, you could post this card as a downloadable resources from your website. Consider using the budget to buy a newspaper or radio ad, or boost posts on social media. You could also use the budget to pay for a radio or newspaper ad, or promote it with boosted posts on social media.

→ STEP 2 PREPARE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS cont'd



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

CHECKLIST

CAMPAIGN BUILDER

TIP

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

Budget for deploying CORE TOOLS – Speak to your local printer and/or sign maker 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.

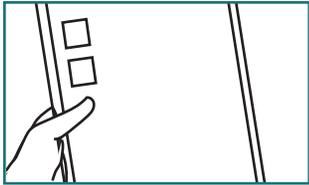
Website. It's likely that most residents visiting your website are looking for information on how to properly handle a particular item. Providing easy search functions for that information will help ensure that item does not become contamination. Or, consider adding an image of your annual info card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

Campaign Builder. The best option for creating a FREE, downloadable, ready to print, and easy to change annual info card and top issue postcard, for your drop-off site can be found through our **CAMPAIGN BUILDER**.

Social Media. Make use of social media and your website to remind your community how to recycle better. Look to [The Recycling Partnership's Social Media Kit V2](#) for 52 weeks worth of posts, images, and ideas.

→ STEP 3 IDENTIFY and TRAIN STAFF

Resident education alone will not improve your recycling stream. Direct 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:

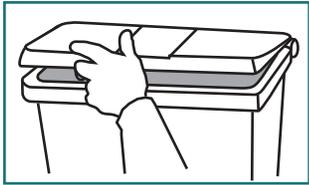
- Staff to talk to residents visiting your drop-off site on the busiest days and times.
- A training session for those staff.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

- a** First, you'll need to find staff. Look to existing on-site staff first, then to volunteers, and finally to temps or part-time hires. The ideal candidates will be helpful, friendly, likable and chatty.
- b** It's critical that your staff, the front line of communications at your site, know what is and is not accepted and where it goes for processing. Provide all drop-off staff simple talking points to ensure they understand the new signage and benefits of a high quality stream. Train them to share the message in a friendly way. For example, "Hi. I see you have some clothing you're trying to recycle. We don't accept that here because it causes problems and safety issues in the recycling process, but you can donate it down the street. Thanks for recycling!"
- c** Some residents will want much more information about your program, recycling processing, or other options once they leave your site. Be sure your staff knows where on your website they can access this info.

→ STEP 4 DEPLOY CORE TOOLS and PROVIDE ON-SITE FEEDBACK

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 6 to 8 weeks, then repeat in smaller doses to maintain results.



WHAT YOU’LL NEED:

FAQ

- 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

- Double check that your mailers and other printed items are correct. Review training materials with front line staff.
- Tell your hauler and MRF your start date so that everyone is aware when you are ready to launch.
- 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.”
- Launch.
- Prepare for the next phase – program maintenance – which should include continued dialogue with your MRF, regular communication with customers, and regular 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:

MRF TRACKING FORM

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

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 a representative sample of collection 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.

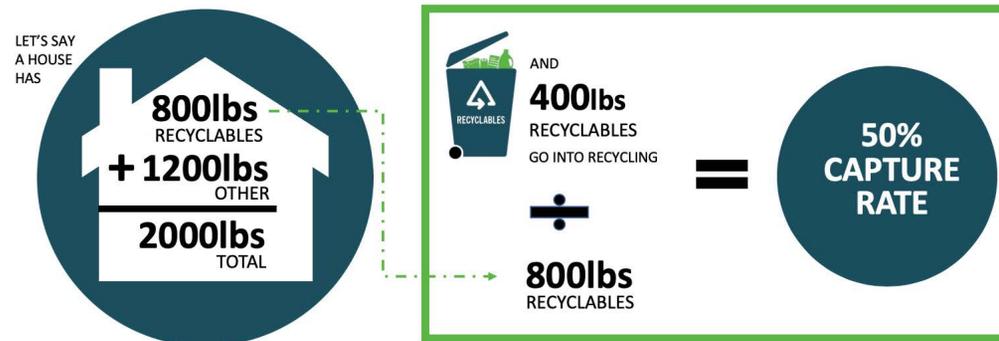
Contamination rate: Work with your MRF to get this on a regular basis. Use the **MRF TRACKING FORM** and protocol.

Drop-off visitation: Capture visitation – the number of residents using your site each day with clickers, tally counters, or an app.

Maintain: Check in with your staff to answer their questions and make sure everyone is still on the same page.

Follow-up: Don't forget to let the residents know how the program changes are going! Keep them up to date and thank them for their patience and help in creating a cleaner recycling stream. Consider a press release, social media post, or [interview with your local news outlet](#).

CAPTURE RATE: How much of recyclables are really going where they should?



ARTWORK

Design files for both the core tools and general promotion tools.

ASSESSMENT FORM

Are you ready to improve the quality of your recycling?

BUDGET

Use this generic budget form to consider the costs of implementing and maintaining your new quality-control program.

CAMPAIGN BUILDER

Create your info card and top issue mailer using our free online campaign builder. Download the final files and send them straight to your printer!

CHECKLIST

Put the plan and the components to work.

CONTRACT CONSIDERATIONS

Tips for smart contracts.

FAQ

Train your staff and others involved in the program with these FAQs.

MRF SURVEY

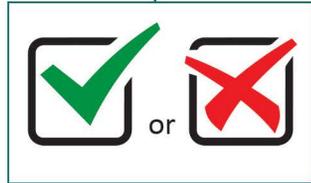
Start improving quality by working with your MRF to identify issues and goals.

MRF TRACKING FORM

Track contamination metrics.

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: INCREASING QUANTITY AND IMPROVING QUALITY

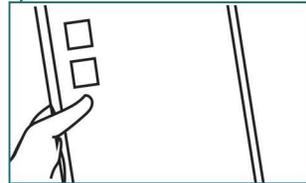
Surveys show that most residents want to recycle right, but many don't know how. Use this kit and **CHECKLIST** to help recyclers do the right thing.



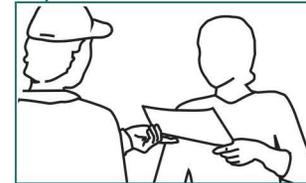
Gather key facts from your MRF and hauler



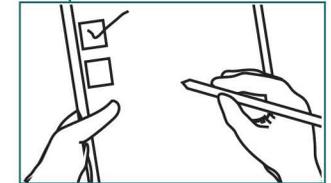
Customize your CORE TOOLS



Identify and train Staff



Deploy CORE TOOLS and provide On-site resident feedback



Track results, evaluate, and adjust

CORE TOOLS

Consistent messaging and direct feedback at the drop-off center encourage better recycling.



TOP ISSUE SIGNAGE

Target your most problematic contaminant by posting eye-catching temporary signage at your site. These signs should stay up for 6 to 8 weeks.



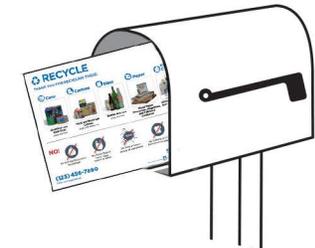
IN-PERSON FEEDBACK

Direct feedback is extremely powerful in changing behavior. Train your staff, and provide them with handouts and talking points.



SITE SIGNAGE

Clear and simple signs help residents know what to do. Consider updating overly detailed signs with simple messages.



ANNUAL INFO CARD

Residents need to know what you want, as well as what you don't want. Mail this INFO CARD annually to give residents current reference guide to your basic YES and NO lists.