CONFRONTING CONTAMINATION
Tactics from the Tarheel State
OVERVIEW OF NORTH CAROLINA

Statewide education campaigns: Recycle Guys, Re3, and Recycle More NC

100 Counties, over 500 local governments

- Curbside > Drop-off
- Most are Single Stream

NC landfill bans

Over 700 recycling businesses

Developed MRF infrastructure
CHALLENGES TO RECYCLING COMMUNICATION

- Not everything is recyclable
- Complex process, complex messaging
- Contracting from early SS mentality (easier = more volume)
- Packaging is constantly changing
- Chicken and the egg approach to markets
- MRF technology changes evolve the accepted materials list
- Nothing is uniform
- Most effective communication tool (face to face, trusted source) is most time consuming
- Frustrating to understand what is and what isn’t sometimes
TAKING ON CONTAMINATION ON TWO FRONTS

Recycling and Solid Waste Professionals

The Public
TALKING WITH YOUR MRF

REALLY understand the separation process
  - Small things
  - Tanglers
  - Materials not in their original shape

Talk about materials that could be problematic
  - Shredded paper
  - Large metal objects
  - Unrecyclable plastic

Balance pressure to add more materials with the feasibility of their recovery

Know the top contaminants and threats to quality
RESOURCES

IMPROVING MATERIAL QUALITY

Strong and healthy Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) are a cornerstone of county and municipal recycling programs in North Carolina. MRFs are better able to support your program and possibly share the revenues if they receive high-quality materials.

**HOW THEY WORK:**

- **Know where your materials go:** Whether you use public staff or a contractor to collect recyclables, make it a priority to know which MRF receives your recyclables and what materials your MRF can accept, process, and market from your program. Visit and talk to your MRF as often as you can. MRFs will appreciate your efforts to improve material quality and will support those efforts. As interns see these workshops, drop off their material quality, they may lose more revenue from their program. Everybody wins if the right stuff is in the bin.

- **Quality matters:** Here are some simple ways your community can positively influence high-quality material quality:

  - **Get the bugs out:** Plastic bags and other thin plastic are very difficult for MRFs to handle and can cause equipment and contamination of outgoing contaminated. Educate your citizens to keep plastic bags out of recycling carts and drop-off bins. Encourage them to use alternative outputs such as retail stores instead. A good resource for sharing on your website or other outreach materials is [link to Materials Recycling Institute](https://www.materialsrecoveryinstitute.org).

  - **Avoid contamination:** Food and liquids create materials that can seriously reduce material quality. Educate residents to empty bottles, cans, and jars before recycling them and extract them to keep food or containers with food in them out of the recycling. Related containers include empty cans, paper, and glass paper products. Check with your MRF for specific questions about acceptable materials.

  - **Avoid shredded paper:** Many communities allow citizens to put shredded shredded documents, handwriting, and printing. Unfortunately, because of the high recyclables are processed at MRFs, much of that shredded paper ends up mixed with glass or is lost in material streams. Not only that, but it is a recycling market. Shredded paper also comes in paper bags, which makes problem-solvers mines. And lots of net paper is costly, contaminating machine-processing facilities. Take shredded paper out of your material mix and point citizens to alternative solutions such as commercial shredding services or their local compost bin.

  - **So clear about plastic:** Citizens are easily confused by plastics and often confuse the recycling center. Check the bottom of plastics to make recycling decisions. Some will end up with unrecyclable or very low-value material, which costs them money and reduces the value of the plastics they receive. Therefore, what do they do? To understand what your MRF can handle and then communicate carefully and consistently to the public about plastics. Avoid phrases like "all plastics," unless you are referring to the number of it but instead specify what type of plastic. North Carolina in MRFs, such as "plastic bottles," "only plastic bottles and tubes," or "for food, beverage, personal care, and household plastic containers." Remember to be clear and simply say what you don't want, e.g., "no straws or plastic bags." Citizens should also get the message to leave their caps on their plastic bottles.

**DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSISTANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE**
TWO (OVERSIMPLIFIED) SOURCES OF CONTAMINATION

Never Recyclers

Generally unaware of how to recycle.

Using the recycling cart as a second trash can.

Likely to require a more aggressive approach like code enforcement, cart hangers, and direct contact, or fines.

Overzealous Recyclers

Think they know how to recycle.

Keep messages positive and proactive.

Explain why some materials are problematic.

Provide alternative recycling options when possible.

Avoid overwhelming people, tackle the 3 most common/problematic sources of contamination. Fix those, then move down the list.
TAKING THAT TO THE PUBLIC IN A SIMPLE WAY

Update outreach with images and words that people can understand

Prioritize messaging with top contaminants

Promote alternatives

Be positive

Be consistent
**BROCHURES AND SIGNS**

Uses images

Prominent NO BAGS message

Uses words that people recognize

“Milk and Juice Cartons” not “gable top containers”

“Butter Tubs” instead of “rigid plastics”

Avoids messaging like “Plastics 1-7”

Plastic Bottles, Jugs and Tubs

Plastic Food Containers (getting a little slippery?)

Has a clear yes AND no list

No bags, Styrofoam, food/liquids, etc.
IF YOU SAY THIS... WILL YOU GET THIS?
Five Communities all Using the same MRF

**Town of Cary**
- Yes- Bottles and tubs #1-7, lids places back on bottle, tub, or jar, rigid #2 plastics
- No- bags, frozen food trays, clamshells/hinged containers, toys, flower pots

**Town of Wake Forest**
- Yes- Narrow-necked, screw-top bottles, such as soda bottles, dairy containers, plastic milk and water jugs and colored bottles labeled with the RICs, six pack rings with rings cut
- No- bags, Styrofoam, and plastic bottles containing oil or hazardous substances

**City of Durham**
- Yes- plastic bottles, jugs and jars
- No- take-out ‘clamshell’ containers

**Franklin County**
- Yes- plastic soda bottles or milk jugs
- No- bags or bowls

**Nash County**
- Yes- plastic drink bottles and milk jugs
- No- non-bottle plastics
COMMON SUITE AND REGIONAL MESSAGING

All communities feeding same MRF.

Communities came together to create new outreach.

Same messaging and terms where you work, live and play.
CLINTON, NC

Located in Sampson County
- Tier 2 (economically distressed)

Population – 8,743

Underserved population demographics:
- Rural
- Per capita income $24,973
- Language spoken at home, other than English (7.9%)
- Race/Ethnicity: African-American (40%), Native American (0.8%), Latino/a (8.1%)

**Project Objective:** How to appeal to hard-to-reach/underserved populations in an effort to increase recycling participation and decrease incidences of contamination
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME & RACE/ETHNICITY CLUSTERS
WHAT GOES IN THE RECYCLING CART?
Almost everyone knows that bottles and cans are recyclable! However, the following materials are still commonly confused. This quick list answers whether the following belongs in your blue cart or not. Turn over for a full guide of recyclables. It’s easy—no bags or sorting required!

YE S
Soap & Shampoo Bottles
Phone Books
Magazines, Newspapers & Inserts
Envelopes
Detergent & Fabric Softener
Toilet & Paper Rolls

NO
Household Trash
Plastic Bags
Foods & Liquids
Clothing
Styrofoam
Ceramics & Dishware

BE CART SMART!
Here is a guide to help you learn what belongs in your blue cart. Find out when your collection week is through our website. Start making a difference today!

PAPER
Mixed paper
Phonebooks
Junk mail
Paper bags
Food boxes
Paper egg cartons
Paper towel rolls
Newspapers & Inserts
Magazines & catalogs
Flattened cardboard boxes
Cartons: milk, juice, soup

PLASTIC
Beverage bottles & jugs
Food tubs & containers
Soap, shampoo & conditioner bottles
Detergent & softener jugs

METAL
Aluminum & tin cans
Empty aerosol cans

GLASS
Bottles & jars
Mixed colors

PLEASE DO NOT BAG YOUR RECYCLABLES!

ALTERNATIVES
While these materials are NOT accepted curbside, there are alternative solutions to keep them out of the landfills. Visit our website for full details.

PLASTIC BAGS
Plastic bags are recyclable, but not curbside. Check with your city’s retail stores if they accept returned plastic bags.

ELECTRONICS
Computers, TVs, monitors, cell phones and many other electronics are accepted in our recycling program. For a full list of accepted materials and instructions on how to recycle them, please visit our website.

USED COOKING OIL
Used cooking oil and grease can be recycled and turned into a valuable fuel. Please visit our website for drop-off locations.

CLOTHING
Many charities accept clothing donations.

WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT

OOPS!
A VOID COMMON RECYCLING MISTAKES
Your cart contains items NOT recyclable curbside. Improperly recycled materials can contaminate whole recycling loads and cause problems with the recycling equipment. These items are NOT recyclable curbside:

- Household trash
- Plastic bags
- Styrofoam
- Clothing
- Food & liquids
- Cardboard

PLEASE DO NOT BAG YOUR RECYCLABLES!
Recycling Participation Rates & Outreach Methods

Month & Year
- December 2013
- January 2014
- February 2014
- March 2014
- April 2014
- May 2014
- June 2014
- July 2014
- August 2014
- September 2014
- October 2014

Participation Rate
- 0.00%
- 10.00%
- 20.00%
- 30.00%
- 40.00%
- 50.00%
- 60.00%
- 70.00%
- 80.00%

Overall Participation Rate
- Thursday Participation Rate

- Lowest participating area
- 68.35%
- 54.22%
- 70.20%
- 61.52%

Avg. Participation Rates (April 2014 – October 2014)
- Lowest participating area
- 72.87%
- 62.24%
- 70.96%
- 65.22%
CARY, NC CONFRONTS CONTAMINATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 10, 2015

Cary Begins Recycling Survey to Help Citizens Curb Contamination

Cary, NC – Don't call 'em scavengers or lucky looters - now through September, Town of Cary recycling crews will be individually surveying recycling carts as they look for and filter out popular contaminants in an effort to reduce Cary's recycling contamination while simultaneously educating curbside customers.

Beginning with Tuesday, July 14's blue waste service, a three-person crew will manually dump recycling carts: large containers, like bubble wrap, plastic bags, bagged recycling, and pizza boxes will be left in the cart along with educational information on the proper ways to participate in the Cary Recycling program. It will take roughly 12 weeks to survey every recycling cart one time in Cary. In 2015, the Town's recycling contamination, or "recede," rate was 9.37 percent, which mirrors the state's average municipal rate for single-stream recycling but is well above Cary's goal of five percent.

"Thanks to citizen support, our curbside recycling program has grown so much over the years. However, when we collect a contaminated cart we risk having the entire truckload of recyclables sent to the landfill, which is something we know nobody wants to happen. This survey is a chance to ensure our collective efforts don't go to waste," said Scott Husch, Public Works Director. "By adhering to the Cary Recycling program, we all can recycle more by doing less, keeping the program cost-effective and efficient." For the best result, Husch asked that recyclers remember to keep it loose in the cart, reduce contamination by keeping plastic bags and bagged recyclables out of your cart and only tossing in accepted items.

Implemented in 1989, Cary's recycling program is just one example of how the Town works to lead the state in preserving and protecting natural resources. In Fiscal Year 2014, Cary residents helped to divert over 50 percent of waste from the landfill with about 30 percent coming from recycling. The Town holds year-round workshops and special events focused on recycling, including bimonthly litter sweeps, Earth Day, Reuse Rocks and America Recycles Day. Cary Recycling is open to all Cary solid waste customers and individually owned multi-family complexes: an estimated 75 percent of customers participate in the Town's curbside recycling program.

For a comprehensive list of the more than two dozen items accepted at the curb in Cary, and for tips for proper recycling, search "Curbside Recycling" at www.townofcary.org or call (919) 469-4050.

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RECYCLE MORE DOWNLOADABLES

DON'T TRASH RECYCLING, IT'S EXPENSIVE!

To increase recycling’s value and decrease environmental costs, keep these CONTAMINATORS OUT!

NO PLASTIC BAGS
Plastic bags, and bags that seem to be made of plastic, are not recyclable. Don’t bag your recyclables, keep them loose and free from plastic bags or other contamination.

CLEAN, DRY & EMPTY
Food cans and bottles do not belong in your recycling cart. Clean and dry them first. Cans without their lids and bottles without their caps reduce the ease and don’t mix plastic containers that have food or liquid in them.

NO TANGLERS
Electronics cords, hoses and even wire hangers are not meant for commingled recycling. They tangle things up. Some of these materials may be recyclable through separate collections. They do not belong with your bottles cans and paper.

Click here to insert your contact information

Downloadables tab at www.recyclemorenc.org
BEYOND CURBSIDE

Remember your Away From Home recycling too!

Only ask for the materials that are there, nothing more.

Use labels and pick the right containers/lids to prevent contamination.
LET’S GET STARTED

1. Have you called your MRF today?
2. Talk to your neighbors about regional efforts.
3. Adopt more effective outreach materials.
4. Invest a little time in evaluating your community.
5. Tackle contamination one thing at a time—Start with BAGS!
THANK YOU!
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