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# WISHFUL RECYCLING Q & A

*April 2018*

**Q1.**

**Which wishful recycling contaminant causes the most problems for your operations and why is it problematic?**

**pre format Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency, Cedar Rapids**

Plastic bags. We get a lot of calls about Styrofoam too, but plastic bags end up in recycling bins that are then dropped off at our facility before being transported for processing. We see them daily, sticking out in the piles like a sore thumb. Plastic bags are a problem because our recyclables processor does not accept them for recycling. They get caught in equipment when going through the sorting line and can cause both injuries to employees and damage to equipment. Also, there are so

many of them. Even the ones that aren't incorrectly placed in recycling bins pose problems because they blow around and create litter when thrown away and blow out of the landfill. Plastic bags are a nuisance.

### **Anderson Sainci – City of Dubuque**

Plastic bags. I am not sure why customers believe plastic bags are acceptable materials to place in the recycling bin.



Plastic bags and other trash caught in screen at Mid-America.

### **Mick Barry – Mid America Recycling, Des Moines**

BAGS, BAGS, BAGS, hoses, chains, cables, leashes. They get wrapped around the shafts and plug up the screens, or lock up the shafts and burn up the motors. Twice per day, we have to shut down and clean the screens by hand and knife. Used diapers are also a major problem. Our quality control folks have to shut down the lines to pull diapers out. We get hundreds of diapers every day. A new contaminate that is causing problems is the clear plastic clamshell containers. They come in with food residual and get flattened, causing them to fall into the paper lines

instead of the plastic lines. The quality control team on the paper lines do not see them since they are clear and so they end up contaminating paper.

**Terry Buenzow – Winneshiek County Recycling Department,  
Decorah**

We devote very little of our financial horsepower to glass. It is a safety hazard to handle, and it's overall impact on the landfill life is insignificant.

**Doyle Smith – City of Cedar Falls, Cedar Falls**

Our biggest issue is residents not putting the correct item in the recycling container. For example, we often find newspaper/plastic/Styrofoam in the cardboard containers. We are fortunate that we can weed out a lot of contamination at our main facility before we bale it. During the fall time we often have yard waste in our collection bins as well. We also experience period contamination of garbage in the bins as well.

**Merry Rankin – Iowa State University**

Plastic bags through our single stream system ... problematic because our vendor won't accept them even though they are recyclable.

## Q2.

### **What is the most outrageous item you've ever seen someone try to recycle?**

**Joe Horaney – Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency**

Used tissues and medical sharps.

**Anderson Sainci – City of Dubuque**

A bowling ball.

**Mick Barry – Mid America Recycling**

A prosthetic leg. Oh, and hundreds of diapers per day.

### **Terry Buenzow – Winneshiek County Recycling Department**

It is hard to say what the most outrageous thing we have seen is because we have seen it all. We do a lot of advisement on hoarder-house situations and even did a house where a murder took place, so everything is memorable in its own way.

### **Doyle Smith – City of Cedar Falls**

Just last year we had a toilet dropped off in our glass container. The year before we had a TV antenna in our tin can roll-off.

### **Merry Rankin – Iowa State University**

Not necessarily outrageous ... but there is a lot of confusion about “plastic” straws and serviceware and the fact that they’re not recyclable.



Wishful recycling items at Mid-America.

## **Q3. What is the worst damage/injury you've seen caused**

## by contamination in your organization?

### **Joe Horaney – Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency**

The worst damage occurred at our compost/yard waste facility when a large piece of metal was put into a yard waste load. It went into our grinder, causing \$8,000 in damage. The piece of metal could have been recycled for no charge as part of our scrap metal program.

### **Anderson Sainci – City of Dubuque**

Any time a customer is recycling the wrong material it has a negative impact to the local MRF. Usually, the impact is time, energy, and/or money.

### **Mick Barry – Mid America Recycling**

We have had several fires started in the plant by metal objects, like shears, wedging in the screens and getting so hot that they catch paper on fire. This means the plant gets shut down for safety while we put the fire out. Also, we get major damage to our motors that burn up when the shafts get tangled with bags and hoses.

### **Terry Buenzow – Winneshiek County Recycling Department**

We haven't had any major worker injuries which is fortunate. Winneshiek County will be addressing medical sharps in the very near future so everyone may want to watch what we are doing.

### **Doyle Smith – City of Cedar Falls**

The worst damage we have had recently was when someone dumped over five gallons of used oil at our recycling site. We were lucky the guy also dropped off a bag of garbage with the oil containers in it so we found out who he was and had the police go after him.

### **Merry Rankin – Iowa State University**

Food waste and remnants left in recyclable containers and put into single stream ... contaminating most all of the recyclables.

## **Q4.**

## **How does wishful recycling impact your end product**

## and/or bottom line?

### **Joe Horaney – Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency**

Wishful recycling impacts our bottom line because materials that cannot be recycled contaminate the entire load of recyclables they are packed away with. For example, if a ton of otherwise acceptable recyclables has 10% contamination, that good 90% is going to be landfilled.

### **Anderson Sainci – City of Dubuque**

There is a cost associated when customers place unacceptable materials in the recycling bins/carts.

### **Mick Barry – Mid America Recycling**

The wishful recycling is an expense we have to incur by taking material to the landfill at our own cost, thus raising our cost of operation. Our two primary inbound customers are currently experiencing 11.85% and 19.36% contamination from trash and wishful recycling.

The second issue is that some contamination gets by the sorters and does end up in the product, thus the issue of the day, China's Green Sword. Large cities have recycling systems that just can't handle the trash. Des Moines is a small generator compared to larger cities like Chicago, New York or LA and we are generally able to clean everything up to meet the specs that China has now implemented on the Global Recycling Market.

### **Terry Buenzow – Winneshiek County Recycling Department**

We don't have any illegal or malicious dumping in Winneshiek County that is worth mentioning. It's a different kind of world in this part of Iowa. We have 57 collection bins scattered across the county and the big drop off facility at the recycling plant. They are all left wide-open, unmonitored 24/7.

### **Doyle Smith – City of Cedar Falls**

We can get most of it out as long as the employees are paying attention and pull the contamination out before we bale it.



**Merry Rankin – Iowa State University**

Increases contamination, which in turn requires full containers of recyclables to be put into the waste stream.

**Q5.****How do you manage contamination as a result of wishful recycling?****Joe Horaney – Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency**

We try to prevent it before it occurs. We have staff keep an eye in the area where residential recyclables are dropped off so customers with materials that cannot be recycled are stopped and educated before putting the materials in the recycling pile. We also work with municipal and commercial haulers who collect residentially to educate their customers when their recyclables go curbside.

**Anderson Sainci – City of Dubuque**

Ongoing education.

**Mick Barry – Mid America Recycling**

We are only the processor and the contamination/wishful recycling management is the responsibility of our municipal/planning area agencies. But, from a processing standpoint, we have our receiving operator watch for the big items, like computers, furniture, swimming pools, kid's riding toys, hoses, bbq grills, propane tanks, etc. They remove as many items as they can visibly see before they enter the system. Then our presort (4-6 people) hand sort as the material enters the system to find smaller things like car springs, car brake rotors, ice coolers, furnace filters, diapers, bags, small electronics, etc.

**Terry Buenzow – Winneshiek County Recycling Department**

Incorrect items are sometimes put in the recycling bins but they are well intentioned. We address it regularly as part of my live radio programs.

**Doyle Smith – City of Cedar Falls**

We either throw it away or recycle it in the proper bunker depending on the contamination.

**Merry Rankin – Iowa State University**

Currently managed via becoming garbage ... unfortunately.

**Q6.****What methods are you using to reduce contamination from wishful recycling and what has been the most effective method(s) for your organizations?****Joe Horaney – Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency**

Education and marketing efforts. There is not one magic bullet to reach all people all the time. Agency staff try to engage as many people as possible to let them know the right way to recycle and divert material using social media, radio, web ads, tours and direct outreach at public events, such as farmers markets and health expos.

**Anderson Sainci – City of Dubuque**

Educating all of our customers.

**Mick Barry – Mid America Recycling**

We have to rely on the communities that deliver the single stream collections to us to work with the wishful recyclers via education. Our two major contracts require us to contribute \$1.25 per ton for every ton of material that is not trash to a fund for them to use in their outreach efforts. Operationally, we have slowed our processes down so that we can capture more of the trash and maintain higher quality end products. It costs us more in operations due to the slower operational speed.

**Terry Buenzow – Winneshiek County Recycling Department**

The methods I use to reduce contamination and encourage participation could be seen as a bit unconventional, but for Winneshiek County they are not. We have a strong local live radio presence (no advertisements) that educates people in an unusual way. We also avoid using warning signs or any signs at all that have a negative word on them. We just tell people we love them. It works great for us and for a county of 20,000 people with a purely voluntary program, we will put our participation rate up against any program anywhere.



### **Doyle Smith – City of Cedar Falls**

We send letters out and get Code Enforcement involved. Once someone has a police officer knocking at their door they are usually cooperative. We also have signs out encouraging people to call the police or our main number if they see someone doing something wrong. We also try to have security cameras if possible at the drop off locations and main facility.

### **Merry Rankin – Iowa State University**

Currently just education, but we are hiring a university recycling coordinator to assist with considering more collaborative and engaged approaches.

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