

**BRIEF**

Des Moines, Iowa landfilled 20 tons of mixed paper each day this summer

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Dive Brief:

- Instead of being recycled, mixed paper from Des Moines, Iowa's curbside recycling program went to a landfill over the summer, reports the Des Moines Register. Processor Mid America Recycling reportedly disposed approximately 20 tons of mixed paper per day over the course of four months due to its inability to find a buyer in a saturated domestic market.
- The city intends to increase solid waste fees by 2% next year. This is partially meant to cover an anticipated \$50,000 recycling program deficit next fiscal year, as compared to \$320,000 in revenue during 2019.
- Trouble is also reaching the city's suburbs, where Metro Waste Authority (MWA) handles recycling. MWA pays Mid America to process those recyclables, and the fee increased \$18 per ton in October for an estimated \$25,000 increase per month. MWA hasn't increased customers' fees to date.

Dive Insight:

Mid America Recycling President Michael Barry noted in a May article in The Wall Street Journal that even relatively clean materials have been tough to sell. At the time, his company had already landfilled 1,000 tons of paper due to lack of demand after stockpiling it in hopes that prices might improve.

Des Moines is suffering from the same conditions as other areas across the country: depressed markets due in large part due to China's recyclable material import restrictions. King County, Washington — where Seattle is located — generated buzz earlier this year when it was revealed that mixed paper had been going to landfills. Cities in Idaho have been dealing with paper stockpiles, and occasionally disposing of the material, as municipalities consider dropping mixed paper from their lists.

In many cases, degraded and contaminated paper quality further challenges market prices, spurring calls for municipalities to revert to dual-stream programs. Last month, several small cities in New York decided to go back to a dual-stream system, as did Lake Worth, Florida this summer.

Mid America's situation, however, proves that contamination isn't the entire problem. U.S.-based paper recyclers began seeking domestic buyers when China shut its doors to imports, but those markets have quickly reached capacity. However, new hope has sprung in recent months as China-based companies have increased their investments in U.S. paper and plastic recycling businesses. The Northeast Recycling Council released a list of 17 North American paper mills that intend to increase their capacity to process recycled paper in the coming years.

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 Des Moines Register

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 The Wall Street Journal

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