

Think Twice: Recycle Right

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Recycling and composting have become second nature to many of us living in the Ottawa Valley. We rarely think twice about placing our empty pop cans in the Yellow Bin or our empty cereal boxes in the Blue Box. Lately, however, we at the Ottawa Valley Waste Recovery Centre (OVWRC) have noticed an increase in non-recyclable materials mixed in with paper and plastic recyclables. Dirty diapers, old bullets, kitty litter, non-recyclable plastic and used syringes are just some of the things that OVWRC material handlers have come across as they've sorted through our recyclables. It is time that we started to think twice about what we are putting in our recycling bins.

There are some very important reasons why it is important to think twice about what can be recycled. Recyclable material picked up during curbside collection is brought to the OVWRC for processing. Dedicated staff sort through your recyclables by hand, taking care to pick out garbage and other materials which do not belong. The sorted material is compressed into bales and sent to factories which in turn use the recycled materials to produce new items. Placing unsanitary or hazardous items like diapers, syringes, or broken ceramic dishes in your recycling containers puts our staff's health and safety at an unnecessary risk. The material handlers' important jobs are a lot easier and safer when residents are extra careful to include only recyclable material in the Yellow Bin and Blue Boxes.

The other main reason why it is important to recycle right is that when garbage or hazardous waste is mixed in with recyclables it contaminates the recyclable material. Material with high levels of contamination takes longer to sort and is ultimately less recyclable. That means increased operating costs during a time when, due to the economic downturn, the revenues from the sale of recyclables have decreased significantly.

So how do you know if an item is recyclable or compostable? The OVWRC produces various newsletters throughout the year reminding residents "What Goes Where". Residents can also look at the back of their municipality's collection calendar for a detailed list of what is acceptable in each waste stream. The Centre also has a detailed "What Goes Where" guide posted on the homepage of their website, www.ovwrc.com. If residents are still unsure of where an item should go, they are encouraged to call the OVWRC hotline at 613-735-7537.

Keeping up to date with what is and what is not recyclable can be confusing. For example, not all plastics are recyclable, even if they have the recycling symbol on it. Plastics are made up of specific chemical compositions and different compositions melt and blend at different temperatures and rates. For that reason, the OVWRC is only able to accept food, beverage, cleaning, personal and pet care plastic containers, as well as only grocery/retail shopping bags for recycling. All other plastics, including toys, Tupperware and blister packaging are not recyclable even if it has the recycle symbol on it.

Recycling and composting are great habits to get into. However, if we are not recycling right we are not recycling. Take the time to think twice about whether or not the item you want to dispose of is recyclable, compostable, garbage, or hazardous waste. Let's work together to "walk lightly on the environment".