

# Drop-off Recycling Contamination Reduction Kit

## 6 Steps to Replicate The Recycling Partnership's Drop-off Anti-Contamination Program.

### A Step-By-Step Guide

We know that many communities utilize drop-off sites for single, dual and/or multi-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.

This kit has been designed to provide steps, tools, and resources to help you improve the quality of the material stream at your drop-off sites. 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:

- Increase the quality of the recycling stream
- Save on disposal fees
- Improve program satisfaction
- Improve the capture of quality recyclables
- Limit illegal/illicit dumping

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.

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#### 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
- Strategies for limiting contamination and illegal/illicit dumping
- Tools to help you track and report results
- Quick links to resource documents



Developed with MI EGLE, with past support from MassDEP



## 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
- Direct mailers to households

Proven results from implementation of this kit have included:

- Decreased overall contamination
- Decreased illegal/illicit dumping
- Decreased occurrences of the most problematic contaminant
- Increased resident participation at recycling drop-off sites

### Overall Contamination Decreased by 45%

In one Michigan community's recycling drop-off program, overall contamination by weight decreased from 32% to less than 18% with the implementation of this quality improvement program and at the same time they saw an 11% increase in recycling tonnage.

### Targeted Contaminates Decreased by 43%

In one Massachusetts community, the specifically targeted contaminants—bagged recycling and bagged trash—decreased from 94% of the contamination by weight to only 53% of the contamination by weight, substantially reducing the overall contamination.

### Participation Increased by 11%

In one Michigan county's drop-off recycling program, low participation was the top issue. With focused education to county households on how and where to recycle, the county saw an 11% increase in recycling participation.

#### PRO TIP

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

- customer traffic stayed consistent and/or increased
- users of the site were pleased with clearer, upgraded signage
- site managers expressed 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](#)

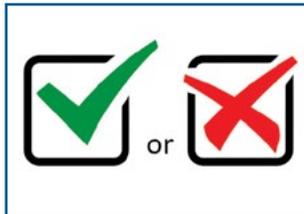


click links for related documents

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: IMPROVING QUALITY

Surveys show that most people want to recycle correctly, but when tested, they don't actually know how. Use this kit and [checklist](#) to help recyclers do the right thing.

### PREP: 6-8 WEEKS



**Gather key facts** from your MRF and Hauler.



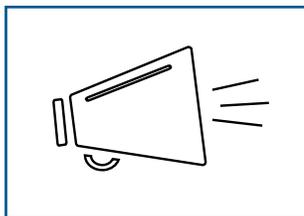
**Prep your outreach materials.**



**Identify and train staff.**

### IMPLEMENT

#### INFORM



**Create outreach materials** and prepare staff to engage with residents.

#### ANNUAL INFO CARD



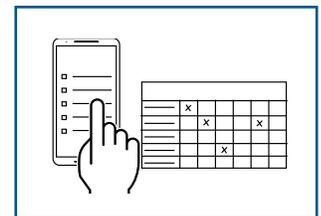
People need to know what is recyclable as well as what isn't. **Mail an annual info card** to give them an easy reference guide to your basic YES and NO lists.

#### IN-PERSON FEEDBACK



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

#### GATHER DATA



**Gather data** at the drop-off sites including participation, household demographics and contamination observed.

#### SITE SIGNAGE



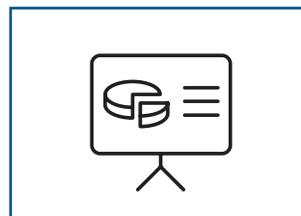
**Clear and simple signs** help everyone know what to do and can overcome language barriers. Consider updating overly detailed or text heavy signs with simple, pictorial messages.

#### 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.

#### SHARE RESULTS



**Share results** with partners including the MRF, hauler, community members and leaders.

#### MAINTAIN



Continue to **spot check site bins** and educate households about contamination.

Open lines of communication with your MRF and hauler are critical. Speak with them to find out the biggest problematic materials in your recycling stream.



## WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

### MRF SURVEY

- Your MRF contract (if separate from hauling)

## WHAT YOU'LL DO

- 1 Set up a meeting with your MRF and hauler.
- 2 Use this [MRF Survey](#) to guide your discussion and narrow down the top five problematic materials. (You'll highlight these in many of your communication tools.) This is also a good time to verify that the MRF accepts the items listed on your current outreach materials.
- 3 Name the top contaminant. This will become the central focus of your work to improve quality.
- 4 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.](#)

## PRO 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 [Contractual Considerations](#) in mind when your current contracts are up for renewal. Remember, written contracts are a fundamental best practice.

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:

[STAFFING GUIDANCE](#)

[INSPECTOR SUPPLY LIST](#)

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

### PRO TIP

#### Work with your hauler to get them involved.

Chances are that drivers already know which drop-off sites/bins are the worst offenders. Closely examine your hauler contract, looking for anything about education and enforcement.

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

- 1** 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. Use our [Staffing Guidance](#) to help build your team.
- 2** It's critical that your staff, the frontline 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!"
- 3** Some households 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. Your staff should also be prepared to inform households where alternate recycling locations are for items not accepted at the drop-off site. This information can be delivered verbally or on a printed handout.
- 4** Digital surveys can be created and deployed easily at sites to help gather more insight into your households. Free (or low cost) online tools are available and can be given from a phone or tablet. Once this data is gathered, it can be used to tailor and direct your education to the correct audience. See our [Engagement Survey Guidance](#) tool for sample survey questions.

### PRO TIP

**Worried about complaints?** Some communities are concerned that telling households that they're recycling incorrectly will result in a significant number of complaints and/or households stopping participating in the program all together. Participating communities have not reported this as an issue and in fact report the opposite. Most questions or phone calls from households were positive and most wanted to know more about the recycling program and what can and can't be recycled.

A consistent and clear message is important to ensure residents understand their job as recyclers.



### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

CAMPAIGN BUILDER

CHECKLIST AND TIMELINE

BUDGET

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

DIY SIGNS

- Mailing addresses for every household eligible to use the site.
- Your logo and various forms of contact information including email, phone, website, and social media handles.
- Your budget.

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

Customize your [outreach materials](#).



**In-person feedback / handout.** Customize and 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.



**Annual info card / promotion.** Verify that the acceptable materials and top contaminants are accurate (or make adjustments), then customize, print and mail these cards to every household in your community or target area. Your GIS, Planning Department or local Utility company should be able to provide you with mailing addresses, and the local post office or your printer may be able to help through specific mail carrier routes. Use our [Printing and Mailing Specs](#) to help prepare for your mailing. Consider using some of the budget to buy a newspaper or radio ad, or boost posts on social media. Households will need an info card reminder each year and if budget allows, more often, to stay informed of the locations and what is and is not recyclable in the program.

Customize your site signage using our [FREE DIY SIGNS](#).

**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? Do your signs have too much text and create an unintentional language barrier? Consider updating your signage with clear messaging.

#### PRO TIP

**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.

#### PRO TIP

**Budget for deploying Outreach Materials.**

Speak to your local printer and/or sign maker for an estimate of costs and don't forget to add it to your [Budget](#) spreadsheet. Make sure to get quotes using a bulk mail rate if available to save postage costs.



### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

CHECKLIST AND TIMELINE

CAMPAIGN BUILDER

DIY SIGNS

### PRO 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. See also our [Printing and Mailing Specs](#).

### BEST PRACTICES

There will always be changes within your recycling program and within your resident population. To ensure your quality improvement program sees long-term success, your education and outreach messaging must continue after this program ends.

**Website.** It's likely that most residents visiting your website are looking for information on where to take recycling for drop-off and how to properly handle a particular item. Providing easy search functions for information and/or maps of site locations will help ensure households can easily locate your drop-off sites and prevent items not accepted for recycling from becoming contamination. You may want to consider adding an image of your annual info card to your website, but remember to check in annually with your MRF to ensure accuracy and update accordingly.

**Social Media.** Social media will complement your website and other outreach, reminding your community how to recycle more, better. You can also use social media to update households about changes in your program and encourage them to become more involved with the program. (See how many people Emmet County Recycling in MI reached with a similar post.)

Need help creating engaging social media content for your recycling program? Look to The Recycling Partnership's [Social Media Kits](#) for posts, images, and ideas.

See someone dumping junk at a recycling drop site? Call 1-800-1234 to report it! Keep our drop-off sites and the recycling stream clean!



9,726  
People Reached



1,191  
Engagements

### PRO TIP

When educating around what goes in—or doesn't go in the recycling—messaging space is limited and attention spans are short. The trick is to provide the level of detail people need while keeping the visuals and text clean and organized. Read our [Recycling Education Materials Best Practices Report](#) for more tips.

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:

#### CHECKLIST AND TIMELINE

- Prelaunch meetings with hauler, MRF, and staff.

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

- 1 Double check that your mailers and other printed items are correct. Review training materials and survey tools with frontline staff.
- 2 Tell your hauler and MRF your start date so that everyone is aware when you are ready to launch.
- 3 Inform decision makers and front-line staff, and anyone else who may interact with your community about the details of this program.

In addition, give them a specific answer to:

**Q:** Why is the city/county doing this?

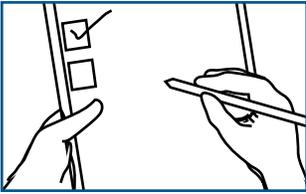
**A:** To protect the health and safety of workers and the recycling system.

- 4 Launch.
- 5 Prepare for the next phase—program maintenance—which should include analyzing all data gathered, continued dialogue with your MRF, and regular communication with households about the most problematic materials.

### PRO TIP

Refer to the [Checklist and Timeline](#) often to ensure you are maintaining your timeline.

There's only one way to measure success and that is to collect accurate data.



### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

#### MRF GRADING FORM

- A spreadsheet, online survey tool, notebook, app, or other means of recording data.
- Clickers, tally counters, cameras or some means to track participation.

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

Use these metrics to monitor the effects of this program.

**Contamination rate.** Work with your MRF to get this on a regular basis. Use the [MRF Grading Form](#) and protocol. Check out our guide to [Contractual Considerations](#) for more information on how to incorporate contamination language into your MRF contract.

**Visual inspection.** Another option to generate metrics onsite includes visual inspection apps designed to record a visual assessment of contamination using a scale system, measure volume of recycling containers, or measuring changes in recycling quantity and/or quality through scheduled photographs inside collection containers.

**Drop-off visitation.** Capture the number of residents using your drop-off site each day—with clickers, tally counters, cameras, traffic counters, or an app.

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

**Survey results.** Use data gathered from your survey tool(s) to tailor communication and outreach to households to increase efficiency and effectiveness (e.g. message about most common contaminant and/or where it can be taken for proper disposal, etc.).

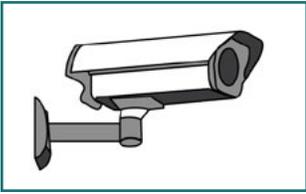
**Follow up.** Don't forget to let households know how the program changes are going! Keep them up to date and thank them for their patience and help in creating a cleaner recycling stream. Consider a press release, social media post, or interview with your local news outlet.

### PRO TIP

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. Data can be entered on a community or county level and can be entered for drop-off, curbside, multi-family and/or public space recycling programs. Learn more [here](#).



To curb illegal/illicit dumping and drop-off site contamination, additional security features need to be considered.



### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

#### BUDGET

- Site logistics including bin placement and electricity/WIFI capabilities.

### PRO TIP

Research shows that any visible signs of illegal/illicit dumping at drop off sites will encourage and promote more dumping (Broken Window Theory). Unstaffed sites will see some illegal/illicit dumping, so the key to reducing and controlling that activity will be understanding and incorporating it into your daily operations. Have a route driver or staffer drive out to the site(s) each morning to clean up broken glass, pick up bulky items left behind, etc. The cleaner the site the more people will use it properly and illegal/illicit dumping will diminish.

### WHAT YOU'LL DO

After looking at your budget and site logistics, consider adding one or multiple security features to provide long-term contamination reduction solutions.

**Cameras.** Cameras can be a cost effective solution and minimally invasive way to minimize illegal/illicit dumping and reduce contamination of drop-off bins. They are also a way to capture patron usage to determine participation as well as identify peak times/days of use. Things to consider before installing cameras: what are the WIFI and power source requirements and availability onsite? Does the camera have/need an external battery supply? Does it use a memory card or cloud-based server? Does the camera stream a continuous feed or motion-activated pictures?

**Fencing.** A slightly more involved method of limiting access at drop-off sites is to install a fence and gate. This can be a more costly and time intensive option to limit contamination so consider all of the outcomes before choosing a fence. Can you afford to place a fence around your site and/or does your bin placement on a larger pad allow for a fence? Can you install a fence to limit access or must the site be open 24/7? Can you issue fobs/codes to access an electronic gate at the site to control access?

**Lighting.** Minimal lighting can also act as a security feature without requiring as much site improvement as fencing. Not only can lighting help people see and feel safer at the site, it limits those looking for a dark place to dump illicitly.

**Permanent Staff.** If budget allows, a permanent staff person could prove beneficial. Staff can provide continual feedback to patrons about recyclability of items, clean up illegal/illicit dumping as it happens to prevent further dumping and monitor for and remove other contamination inside the bins before recycling heads to the MRF. Having staff onsite, even part time, shows dedication to the recycling program and can prevent abuse of the site in the future.

### PRO TIP

**Visibility is key to discouraging illegal/illicit activity at drop-off sites.** Make sure cameras are easy to notice and include signage. If applicable, signs can include language regarding possible fines or other legal ramifications due to illegal behavior.

This is where you'll find all of the worksheets referenced throughout this document. If you'd like to download the full set with one click—this is [here](#).

## PLANNING/STAKEHOLDER

### [Checklist and Timeline](#)

Use to plan your drop-off quality improvement project and ensure the project is staying on track

### [Assessment Form](#)

Use to determine if your community is ready to conduct a quality improvement program

### [MRF Survey](#)

Use to align the community and MRF on acceptable and unacceptable lists

### [Budget](#)

Use to estimate the cost of the quality improvement program

### [Contractual Considerations](#)

Tips for smart contracts.

## EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS

### [Printing and Mailing Specs](#)

Use to work with printer/mailing companies on printing and mailing needs

### [Communications Plan](#)

Use to develop a plan for education and outreach throughout the quality improvement program

### [Social Media Kits](#)

Our social media kits include content you can schedule throughout the year with text and images—you have seasons, holidays, contaminants, and more.

### [Recycling Education Materials Best Practices Report](#)

Read to better understand how to message effectively on your recycling program

## MEASUREMENT TOOLS

### [MRF Grading Form](#)

Use to visually inspect loads and provide feedback on quality of the material by truck/site

### [Engagement Survey Guidance](#)

Use to create a resident survey that can be conducted onsite to maximize resident engagement

## STAFFING/TRAINING TOOLS

### [Inspector Supply List](#)

Use to equip site staff with the correct materials to conduct the quality improvement program

### [Staffing Guidance](#)

Use to plan the quantity and type of staff to hire