

## Background

Starting in June 2016 representatives from haulers, cities, counties, the state and other regional organizations and associations met to discuss how to improve recycling efficiency through coordinated messaging and community outreach. Recognizing the discord of recycling messages, the Recycling Education Committee (REC) sought to better coordinate on recycling communications and outreach. After a series of meetings, the group identified a set of materials that were universally agreed upon to *always* or *never* be acceptable for curbside recycling collection.

The group plans to communicate this, and other messages, to their respective networks (i.e. haulers, local communities, recycling organizations) whenever possible or applicable. Stakeholders recognize that the recycling process is not one-size fits all, and haulers and processors will inevitably have processes or technologies that call for different collection parameters. This is also important to know, in order to tailor communications geographically.

The Minnesota REC met quarterly in 2016 and will continue to do so. The group developed this white paper to explain the inherent difficulties of streamlining recycling communications in an ever-changing industry and to purport a multi-faceted approach to increasing recycling education and communication across the state with the aim to raise recycling rates and reduce contamination.

## Mission

The purpose of the group is to seek understanding from key stakeholders on recyclable and compostable materials, build consensus on what is universally acceptable/not acceptable, and agree on consistent messaging to communicate in an efficient and coordinated fashion throughout the state. REC can identify problem-materials that could threaten the industry (like plastic bags) and communicate uniform resistance on such products. REC is also a forum to share information amongst stakeholders around current recycling issues and acceptable/ not acceptable materials including a given material's impact on operating costs, availability, market value, potential amount, and environmental and social impacts.

Any information or communication materials that REC publicizes will be put in a format for stakeholders and communities to disseminate or use to inform their own decision-making. A priority for this group will be identifying how these efforts can be sustained through collaboration of resources (staff time, financing, etc.).

## Key Messages

It is important to maintain consistent messaging about curbside collection 'acceptable items' lists. These communication guidelines will outline best practices for consistently distributing messaging about commonly accepted curbside materials to recycle, compost or dispose of as trash.

## Example Messaging

### Always Recycle in your Household Bin

#### (All items should be empty, rinsed, and capped)

- Steel & aluminum cans
- newspaper and magazines
- office paper and mail
- cardboard

- boxes: food, beverage, toiletries
- glass jars and bottles
- plastic bottles, containers, jugs (#1, 2, 5)
- cartons

#### Never Recycle in your Household Bin

- plastic bags
- shredded paper
- tanglers (hoses, extension cords, holiday lights, etc)
- diapers and pet waste
- hazardous materials (motor oil, propane tanks, etc)
- Styrofoam packaging
- egg or ice cream cartons
- medical wastes (sharps, lancets, etc)
- scrap metal
- ceramics, mirrors

#### Example Messaging for Organics for Composting

##### Always in the Curbside Organics Bin

- fruit/vegetable scraps
- meat, bones
- dairy
- food- soiled paper and compostable serviceware
- napkins, paper towels tissues
- soiled pizza boxes
- coffee grounds, filters
- paper egg cartons
- certified compostable products (i.e. BPI and Cedar Grove)
- cut flowers and houseplants
- wooden chopsticks, popsicle sticks and toothpicks
- shredded paper

##### Never in the Curbside Organics Bin:

- Plastic lined paper
- Frozen food (freezer) boxes
- Fast food wrappers
- Foam packaging
- animal waste, litter and bedding
- diapers and sanitary products
- dryer sheets/lint
- disposable wipes: baby/cleaning/sanitary
- grease/oil
- latex or rubber products
- textiles
- treated wood
- glass/metal/plastics

## Target Audiences

### Residents

Single-family homes, multi-units, schools and dorms, retirement communities/senior living.

### Non-English speaking residents

These residents require translated print materials, interpreters, and materials that primarily utilize images.

### Businesses and institutions

Businesses, hospitals, schools and higher education institutions.

### Elected officials

Legislature, county boards, city councils, city county and state commissions.

### Local Units of government

Cities and counties who can use REC outreach materials to augment their existing programs and stay up to date on evolving recycling markets.

## Tactics

These are potential methods of outreach, which REC can harness to provide effective communication.

### Print materials

Includes fact sheets and flyers, posters and signage, brochures and guides.

### Organizational websites

Includes the web pages of haulers, cities, counties, and other regional organizations and associations.

### Social media

Includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and Snapchat accounts.

### Video

Includes educational and informational videos produced for web/social content, or YouTube.

### Facility tours

Includes tours or other related educational outlets for residents, businesses and elected officials.

### News media, advertising and campaigns

Includes earned and paid media interactions in print, radio, or broadcast/CCTV format.

Haulers, cities, counties, the state and other regional organizations and associations produce their own version(s) of the above-listed communications materials, and REC is not asking them to stop or completely alter current content. However, REC's new effort to be more consistent in messaging means that REC recommends the following guidelines:

- If your organization already produces these types of communication materials (like the Top 10 lists) make sure whatever list you have is consistent with the one agreed to by the REC.
- If your organization is able to accept items beyond the list or different from the list agreed to by the committee, please notify REC. If necessary, REC can then make appropriate changes.

If your organization does not produce these types of communication materials, REC recommends using the agreed upon lists.

## Consensus Building

The Committee will use consensus building as the basis for decision-making. REC considers multiple stakeholder's perspectives in reaching any consensus. While group members may disagree with a certain item or priority for the group, they may consent to the decision and not actively work against that decision. If a blocking concern is raised, it should be respected by the group as valid and impactful to the goal of the committee. An individual may disagree, but still consent to the decision. If someone has a blocking concern (something they may not consent to), they must voice their blocking concern and the group should hear it. A blocking concern would impact not allowing that action to take place.

### Collaboration

REC encourages feedback and takes that feedback seriously. All voices are heard and additional feedback is sought from Greater MN. REC members represent the concerns of their respective networks, organization and/or industry. The group holds the common goal of understanding the benefits and impacts of recycling in Minnesota to provide consistent recycling messages for everyone without minimizing individual or unique opportunities that may exist in individual programs. The advantage of establishing a common base for messaging is that people will hear the same message wherever they are (work, home, etc.) while still allowing and encouraging communities and stakeholders to do more with REC's baseline messaging when possible.

A dialogue will continue with the MPCA on how this work aligns with the measurement practices developed by the MPCA's Sustainable Materials Management department.

### How To Get Involved

The REC is a new and growing collaborative group. REC seeks feedback from the recycling community of Minnesota in order to best serve existing communication programs at the local level. REC recognizes the need for simple, standardized communication to residents and businesses on how to recycle. REC hopes that our efforts will grow Minnesota's recycling industry and work towards meeting ambitious state recycling goals.

This group will continue to meet quarterly and will adjust its focus to meet the needs of its stakeholders. If you have questions, comments or project ideas, please contact a member of REC (listed below).

**Thank You.**

### REC Active Members

Bill Keegan; Dem-Con  
Erin Chamberlain; Dem-Con  
Kate Davenport; Eureka Recycling  
Megan Kuhl-Stennes; Eureka Recycling  
Cathy Jensen; MPCA  
Kayla Walsh; MPCA  
Mark Rust; MPCA  
Sharon Schriever; Olmsted County  
Mark Stoltman, Randy's Sanitation  
Brita Sailer; Recycling Association of Minnesota  
Cara Lee; Richardson, Richter & Associates  
Steve Steuber, Scott County

Julie Moore; Shorewood/Association of Recycling Managers  
 Emily Barker; St. Louis Park/ Association of Recycling Managers  
 Anne Ludvik; Specialized Environmental Technologies

## APPENDIX

### The Research

Research indicates that a community-based social marketing technique is best to motivate behavioral change and disseminate messaging that this group creates. Social marketing is a refined type of outreach and education that focuses on targeting messages based on barriers, delivering tailored messages through respected networks, and using prompts, norms, feedback, commitments, and other visible and social elements to encourage behavior change. Tenants of this technique include: face-to-face communication, less text and more pictures on signs, including social proofs (i.e. 90% of your neighbors have signed a pledge to recycle more,” positive feedback (a smiley face on your trash bill), simplicity, and low barriers to joining (eliminate uncertainty in taking action). Building on these tenants, Lisa Skumatz issued a study to identify the most cost-effective methods for increasing recycling. She found that:

**Table E.1| Outreach / Delivery Costs Per Household  
 (excluding design work, all time “valued”, including volunteer)**

	Cost per Household \$25/hr	Cost per Household \$45/hr	Residential Recall	Impact on Recycling
Bill Inserts	\$0.03 to \$0.05	\$0.05 - \$0.08	Not tested	Not tested
Cart Hangers	\$0.46 to \$0.76	\$0.74 - \$1.20	High	High
Direct Mail	\$0.53 to \$0.58	\$0.61 - \$0.66	High	Medium
Door to Door Outreach	\$3.50 to \$4.00	\$5.20-\$11.75	Medium	High
Email	\$0.00 to \$0.01	\$0.00 to \$0.01	High	Medium to High
Newspaper/Radio	Depends	Depends	Not tested	Not tested
Phone Calls	\$0.65 to \$0.73	\$1.08 - \$1.23	Low	Low

<sup>1</sup> A number lacked control groups, or had small sample sizes, etc.

This data has been extrapolated to Minnesota and can be used to inform our outreach strategies as a group to better influence social norms and create behavioral change at the lowest cost.