



The Environmental Protection Agency's Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) program fosters a systemic approach to using and reusing materials productively over their entire life cycles. EPA Region 4, which encompasses eight southeast states and six tribes, is committed to upholding this approach. Region 4 emphasizes recycling as a sustainable approach to product reuse and waste management.

When recycling is performed in accordance with local regulations, it is better for our communities and our environment. This brochure provides general guidance for recycling effectively and avoiding common recycling mistakes. Though many materials are recyclable, your curbside bin may not be the right place for them. Local recycling programs have specific guidance for which items should be placed in curbside bins. If local recycling centers are not equipped to recycle certain materials, putting those materials in curbside bins can damage recycling equipment or harm human health and the environment.



Wish-Cycling

Even when done with good intentions, putting items that cannot be recycled in your curbside container, or **Wish-cycling**, can do more harm than good.

If you are not sure whether an item can be recycled in your curbside bin, check your county or city website first. **When in doubt, throw it out!**



In 2019, Lee County Florida recycled about 1.8 million tons of the 2.27 million tons of waste generated locally. This achievement brought the County to an 80% recycling rate, surpassing the state goal of 75% set for 2020.

Lee County Solid Waste has made the continued education and involvement of residents a program priority. Much of its recent success is attributed to the County's efforts to spread awareness of correct recycling habits and provide community resources that reinforce the message. Lee County Solid Waste Director, Doug Whitehead, recognizes the effort being made by members of the community. "Strong participation by both residents and businesses has enabled Lee County to meet and exceed the state's recycling goal."

The County hopes to further increase its recycling percentage through identification of neighborhoods and businesses with unrealized recycling potential.

Best Practices for Recycling or Disposing of Household Items

Many items that seem like they should go in your recycling bin should be recycled in other ways or put in the trash. This list is not exhaustive – always check with your local recycling center for more information.

Construction/Demolition Debris



Construction debris such as wood, bricks, scrap metal, shingles and concrete should never be placed in your curbside recycle bin. Materials in good condition can be donated to [charities](#). All other items should be disposed of at a local landfill.

Plastic Bags



Plastic bags can jam municipal recycling equipment. These items are accepted by many supermarkets and big box stores for recycling. Visit [Plastic Film Recycling](#) to find a drop-off location near you.

Electronics



Electronics can contain hazardous materials that pose a risk to human health and the environment if not disposed of properly and should not be recycled in a curbside bin. Visit [this EPA site](#) to find programs developed by SMM Electronics Challenge participants for printers, mobile devices, computers and televisions. To dispose of dry cell batteries, look for in-store recycling bins or community collection events. Check [Call2Recycle](#) for options near you.

For information of disposing all other electronics, visit [Earth911](#).

Clothes/Shoes/Textiles



Textile items such as clothes and shoes cannot be recycled in your curbside container. Donate gently used items locally, visit [this EPA site](#) for more information.

Aluminum Foil



Aluminum foil is not accepted by some curbside recycling programs. Check with your local program before recycling aluminum foil in your curbside bin.

Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Materials



Do not place HHW materials into a curbside recycling or trash container as many of these products can be harmful to humans, wildlife and the environment if not disposed of properly. A few common examples are pesticides/herbicides, petroleum, motor oil, cooking oil, paints, pressurized tanks, incandescent lightbulbs and cleaners.

Visit [Earth911](#) or dial 1-800-CLEANUP for information on proper disposal guidelines.

Packing Material



Packaging materials such as Styrofoam and bubble wrap should not be placed in your curbside recycling bin. If materials have a #6 plastic symbol, check [this map](#) to see if there is a drop-off location in your community.

Styrofoam is accepted by a few facilities, visit [Foam Facts](#) for more information.

If none of these options work for you, dispose of packaging materials in the trash.



Non-Container Glass



Most curbside recycling programs only accept and process container glass, such as food and beverage jars and bottles. Other common household glass, such as drinking glasses, windows, mirrors, lightbulbs, windshields and ovenware, do not go in your curbside bin. Some of these items can be recycled at specific facilities, visit [Earth911](#) for more information. Otherwise they should be donated, if in good condition, or discarded in the trash.

Yard Waste



Organic yard waste is not recyclable. Many municipalities offer a bulk pickup option for these items or have composting programs that accommodate yard waste. Check with your county for regulations and learn more about composting at home on [EPA's website](#).

Cooking Ware



Pots, pans, ceramics and cutlery should not be disposed of in your recycling bin. Gently used items can be donated to a local charity organization. Pots and pans may be accepted at a local scrap metal recycling facility, visit [Earth911](#) for more information.

Old Tires



Tires should not be placed in your curbside recycling bin. Ask your local auto shop if they accept or trade-in old tires. For more recycling options, visit [Earth911](#) or dial 1-800-CLEANUP.

Food Waste



Food waste (scraps or spoiled food) should not be placed in your recycling bin. Most food waste can be avoided with proper planning, prepping and storage. Some municipalities offer composting programs for food waste; some people choose to compost food waste at home. EPA websites provide tips on [reducing food waste](#) and [composting at home](#).



Check Recyclables First: *Reduce Contamination in Your Bin*

Check the material *and its condition* before recycling it. When placing any item in your recycling bin, make sure all loose wrappers and caps are removed. Rinse away any food remnants to avoid contamination. If the residue is sticky, the container should be scrubbed or scraped before placing it in the bin. Substantial grease, oil and other stubborn food remnants can make cardboard and paper unrecyclable.

Resources



EPA Sustainable Materials Management
www.epa.gov/smm

Keep America Beautiful
kab.org

Keep America Beautiful: Recycling
Explorer
berecycled.org/how-to-recycle

S.C. Department of Health and
Environmental Control (DHEC)
www.scdhec.gov/environment/recycling-waste-reduction

Plastic Film Recycling
www.plasticfilmrecycling.org/recycling-bags-and-wraps/find-drop-off-location

EPA Electronics Donation and Recycling
www.epa.gov/recycle/electronics-donation-and-recycling#where

Call2Recycle
www.call2recycle.org/locator

Earth911: Recycling Search
search.earth911.com/?utm_source=earth911-

[header&utm_medium=top-navigation-menu&utm_campaign=top-nav-recycle-search-button](#)

Foam Facts
www.foamfacts.com/recycling

EPA Reducing and Reusing Basics
www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-and-reusing-basics#donate

Earth911: How to Recycle Your Old
Cookware
earth911.com/home-garden/how-to-recycle-your-old-cookware

Deconstruction Resources-
Innovative Materials Management
www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-06/documents/imm_brochure_region_4_final_508_0.pdf
www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-05/documents/cdbrochure.pdf

Composting at Home
www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home

Reducing Wasted Food At Home
www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-wasted-food-home



For more information on sustainability and recycling in Region 4, please contact:

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