



Spokane's recycling

Fast Facts

Residents in Spokane have been recycling for decades. Even so, you may wonder how does recycling work here? And how are the changes in Washington state's approach to recycling going to affect Spokane?

What are changes to what Spokane can recycle? What legislation exists on recycling in the state of Washington?

- Previously, materials collected in recycling bins in Washington state were [primarily shipped to China](#). China paid fees for access to glass, plastic, and other materials to clean and reuse. In 2018, China's "**National Sword**" initiative ceased the export of dirty, difficult-to-clean recyclables to China, and Washington needed a new plan for recycling.
- The lack of revenue from selling recycled goods and the burden of disposing of them resulted in the [Recycling Development Center](#), created in 2019 to propose new solutions.
 - Beginning October 2021, [stores will charge](#) 8 cents for single-use paper or reusable plastic bags, state wide. Compostable (green or brown) bags can be free.
 - Some Washington [pulp mills, such as Norpac](#), can now afford to use recycled mixed paper and cardboard instead of wood chips in their processes, creating about 100 jobs.
 - [Counties with a population of more than 25,000 people](#) will be required to create a **Contamination Reduction and Outreach Plan (CROP)** by July 1, 2021, to reduce the trash and food in recycling that breaks machines and causes delays.
 - In May of 2021, [SB-5022](#) was signed into law.
 - Banning polystyrene containers and packing peanuts starting June 2023.
 - Making it mandatory for customers to only be provided single-use utensils, straws, cup lids, and condiments upon request beginning June 2024.
 - Requiring beverage bottles and trash bags to have a certain percentage of recycled content.
 - [Washington is the first U.S. state](#) to require minimum recycled content for plastic bottles and jugs for household cleaning and personal care products such as laundry detergent, spray cleaners, shampoos, conditioners, and lotions—starting with 15% recycled content in 2025 and increasing to 50% in 2031.
 - Under [Chapter 70A.455 RCW](#), the Washington State Attorney General and local governments have authority to pursue false or misleading environmental claims about a plastic product's ability to biodegrade or be composted.
- In Spokane, the contents of blue curbside bins and the recyclables dropped off at transfer stations are brought to [Spokane Materials and Recycling Technology \(SMaRT\) Center](#). Through a series of machines, these are sorted, packed, and sent to manufacturers across North America who create new products from recycled goods. The SMaRT Center is a **material recovery facility (MRF)** that processes an average of 30 tons of recyclables per hour.
 - The most common items that businesses will purchase from SMaRT are clean cardboard and paper, aluminum and tin, and plastic tubs, jugs, and bottles.

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- Glass recycled in Spokane is not made into new glass. As much as possible, it is ground and made into road base. Very few companies want to purchase collected glass because of its weight and the difficult process to recycle it. When a recycled material is made into something different because the original material would be harder to reuse, it is called [downcycling](#).
- Spokane has had to [switch to bi-weekly recycling](#) to help manage the skyrocketing costs now that recycled items cannot be shipped to China. Between 2013 and 2020, the cost to manage the city's recyclables grew from \$14,000 to \$1.4 million—an increase of 100 times the original cost. Thirteen percent (7,800 tons) of Spokane's recycling has to go to the landfill each year because it has no buyers, especially glass and certain plastics.

What can I do to help with recycling?

- One way to help is [to put the right things in the blue bin](#). Some cities have fines for throwing non-recyclables into the bin, but Spokane does not yet have penalties for this.
 - “Tanglers” (such as twine, garden hoses, holiday lights) thrown into recycle bins halt production when they get caught in expensive recycling machines, and taxpayers often pay the cost with higher fees. Avoid throwing things like these into your recycling bins.
 - Grocery bags can **only** be recycled at certain stores that collect them.
 - Do not bag your recyclables. They must be loose in the bin.
 - Make sure your recyclables are as clean as possible. Food in a recycling bin may cause an entire load to be sent to the landfill instead. If dirty or soiled recycling isn't thrown out, a person rather than a machine has to clean out the dirty food mixed with usable materials.
 - There are certain types of plastics and other materials that are not recyclable in Spokane—regardless of whether a recycling symbol is on the packaging. If you're not sure, you can check on Spokane Recycling and Waste's Directory at <https://spokaneriver.net/wastedirectory/>.
 - You can also call the **Recycling Hotline** at 509.477.6800 with any questions.
- From fax machines to fluorescent light bulbs, there are approved ways to get rid of items. You can get information on where to go to recycle items like these and what the fees are at <http://1800recycle.wa.gov/>.
- The fourth Friday in February is [National Skip the Straw Day](#). Americans [use an estimated 500 million](#) drinking straws a day, and this day is a chance to practice using a bamboo, glass, metal, or silicone straw.

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How is Spokane recycling changing?

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