

Want to keep your trash bill down? Properly clean and sort recyclables

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(Photo: Waste Management Northwest)

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Chinese restrictions on recycled materials imports [put in place this year](#) have effectively shut the country's doors on more than a third of Kitsap County's waste.

This will likely lead to an increase in costs for curbside pick-up customers in coming months, local solid waste officials say.

Getting materials to replacement markets costs more, and many don't take in the same amount or offer the same prices China did.

To mitigate costs, local waste haulers are urging customers to properly clean and sort recyclables. The rate of contamination determines the selling price at market and whether customers see a rebate or further bill increases.

"Everyone who puts stuff in their recycling bin should see themselves as a manufacturer, because you're supplying product to an end user that needs to make something new out of it," said Chris Piercy, program supervisor at Kitsap County Public Works Solid Waste Division. "And if you give them garbage, ... it just takes a really long trip to the landfill."

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Earlier this week, Mason County and the city of Shelton issued a press release asking customers to review recycling best practices to keep contamination levels down.

Piercy agreed with Mason County's remarks and said Kitsap County is launching a social media campaign on proper recycling.

"All recyclables should be empty, clean and dry, and only items on [our recycling guidelines](#) should go in the bin," Piercy said in an email. "The mantra 'when in doubt, throw it out (or find out)' is a great one to live by right now."

Plastic bags and other film plastics, which can wrap around equipment at sorting centers, are the most common and problematic contaminants at Waste Management Northwest, said spokeswoman Jackie Lang.

This month, Waste Management implemented a 73-cent recycling processing surcharge approved by the state Utilities and Transportation Commission. The company has had to slow down its sorting line at the Port of Tacoma and hire 24 new staffers to lower contamination rates, Lang said.

Mason County Garbage requested a similar surcharge for accepting mixed paper a few months ago, but it was denied by the county, according to Bart Stepp, deputy director of the Utilities and Waste Management Division of Public Works in Mason County.

"We have told Mason County Garbage that they can choose not to take recycle items any longer if commodity prices drop to a level that Mason County Garbage is no longer willing to recycle those products," Stepp said in an email. "... But if certain items can no longer be recycled then our self-haul customers would have to pay for disposing those items as waste instead of being recycled at our blue box containers, which is currently free."

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Both Piercy and Stepp said they suspect curbside bills will increase.

Kitsap and Mason service providers, Waste Management and Mason County Garbage, can file with the Utilities and Transportation Commission to change "fair" rates for residents in unincorporated areas when current ones expire Oct. 31.

The owners at Bainbridge Disposal, which offers recycling services to Poulsbo and Bainbridge Island, were not available for comment.

Across the Sound, residents of Puyallup, Sumner, Bonney Lake and surrounding areas saw about a \$2.17 increase in their curbside bill starting July 1, according to The News Tribune.

Other municipalities have had to stop accepting certain items, and some small communities, like College Place near Walla Walla, have had to halt curbside collection altogether.

Kitsap has maintained a conservative list of recyclables it accepts — materials that have stable markets and can be easily sorted — for situations like this, Piercy said.

"People should keep recycling," Piercy said in an email. "Contrary to some of the reports out there, we have heard no indication that the material collected in Kitsap is being landfilled."