



BRIEF

Sacramento, California drops mixed plastics from curbside program

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Dive Brief:

- In July, Sacramento, Calif. distributed pamphlets to residents explaining that only plastics #1-3 would be allowed in recycling bins going forward. The city previously allowed all plastics in its recycling stream, the Sacramento Bee reported.
- In addition to mixed plastics, all shredded paper and plastic foam are banned as well, as they are now low-value materials to recyclers.
- The new rules went into effect on January 1, but the city and contractor Waste Management agreed not to announce the changes until July, as the two parties discussed the specifics. Waste Management spokesperson Paul Rosynsky said that the company is in the process of restricting plastic recycling nationwide.

Dive Insight:

While a few municipalities around the nation have signaled they would stop accepting mixed plastics in the wake of China's National Sword policy, California seemed like it would hold off on restrictions up until now. Unlike other West Coast neighbors, the state was quiet about any program changes until recently and many of its municipalities had pledged to weather the effects at any cost.

Since California has long been a leader in recycling, this relapse could be seen as a sign of what's to come on a national scale, with mixed plastics being the common denominator. Especially since the material accounts for a smaller portion of the waste stream by weight — as compared to mixed paper which has also become problematic — a growing number of U.S. municipalities have viewed it as easier to cut. This could place further pressure on a market that is struggling to come up with new outlets for recyclables.

Sacramento County — with a separate waste management program from the city — has seen its own challenges as it looks for domestic solutions to its mounting problems, choosing to combat curbside contamination in a consumer education and cart inspection program.

Unlike the City of Sacramento, the county doesn't discriminate based on specific plastic numbers, but there are signs that it may be changing its stance. About one month ago, recycling processing facilities contracted by the county stopped accepting plastic bags.

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