

## **City Launches Personalized Outreach Program to Help Residents Understand Changes in Curbside Recycling**

Recently there have been [some changes in the marketplace for recyclables](#) that are affecting what Waste Management can accept in the curbside recycling program. In addition, some of the things incorrectly placed in curbside carts can even shut down operations at the recycling facility. To help reduce high contamination rates reported in curbside recycling in Melbourne and throughout the county, the City of Melbourne ECO Division has begun a program called “Curb Contamination.”

The Curb Contamination program provides more personalized guidance to Melbourne residents to help them understand the changes and what is and is no longer accepted in curbside pickup. Recycling carts are checked for contamination on Wednesday mornings, which is recycling day throughout Melbourne. Informational door hangers are placed at homes where recycling mishaps are found to try to combat recycling confusion. This also provides the opportunity for conversations as people notice the inspections.

There have been four rounds of surveys so far resulting in 375 carts being checked. Of those, about 62 percent of them had items that didn't belong in the carts.

Plastic bags are by far the most common item found that shouldn't be in the carts. While the bags can be recycled at many grocery stores, they are not acceptable in curbside recycling carts. Plastic bags get tangled up in the machinery at the recycling facility where Melbourne's recycling goes for processing.

In addition, Waste Management can no longer accept clam shell containers, the type that hold strawberries and salad mixes, and has never accepted polystyrene, such as egg cartons.

Michelle Smith, the City's Environmental Programs Coordinator, has been conducting the recycling cart surveys and has found some unusual items, including a toy horse on a stick, a small electric fan, a pane of glass, a pool noodle and a dive flipper.

“I think a lot of the contamination is from ‘wish cycling’,” Smith said. “That’s when people want it to be recycled or see the recycling symbol, but unfortunately, it’s not acceptable in our curbside recycling program. Plastic bags continue to be the biggest ongoing problem.”

Besides this new program, the City’s ECO Division has been distributing recycling information to new water customers, running social media campaigns, meeting with work groups in the City to make sure they understand what is acceptable, and providing educational programs to students and adults at summer camps and special events. Programs will continue with students once school resumes in August.

“We believe our residents are working hard to create a sustainable environment, and we are here to help,” said Jennifer Wilster, Environmental Community Outreach Manager.

“The main thing residents need to focus on is getting back to the basics of [recycling aluminum and steel cans, plastic bottles and jugs, and cardboard and paper](#),” Wilster said. “It’s better to throw it out if it’s not one of these things than to contaminate the whole load and risk a shut-down of the recycling facility’s operation.”

Smith will continue the surveys that started in the central Melbourne area and is moving north. She places educational door hangars that have a checklist of things that contaminate recycling and explains what is acceptable.

For more information:

- Contact Jennifer Wilster or Michelle Smith at 321-608-5080.
- [View a list of items that can be put into curbside recycling in Melbourne.](#)