

Wish-Cycling: What it is, and Why You Shouldn't Do It

Do you every stand over your recycle bin, holding plastic grocery bags, a milk bottle cap, or a pizza box, and wonder if you should toss it in? You think "I'm not sure about this, but they'll sort it out at the recycler" so you drop it in and forget about it. You have just "wish-cycled" that object, and instead of doing a good deed for the planet, you have cost your recycler time, money, and potentially created more waste. Here are the problems your good intentions create:

1. Wish-Cycling Wastes Time

Recycling plants use machines to sort and process items. Anything that can get wrapped around machinery - plastic cling wrap, plastic grocery bags, bread bags, garden hoses, extension cords – will jam up the machines, which means the process stops while workers fix the issue; costing time, possibly damaging the machinery, and delaying other items from being recycled.

2. Wish-Cycling Wastes Money

The time spent fixing and possibly repairing jammed machinery costs the recycling plant - and ultimately the taxpayers - money. Many recyclers batch recycled materials and resell them; if the batched items are contaminated with unusable items, this may harm the recycler's relationship with commodities buyers.

3. Wish-Cycling May Create More Waste

Recyclers collect, sort, and sell the recycled material. If a batch is contaminated with non-recyclable items, the entire batch may become unusable. Greasy pizza boxes will ruin a batch of paper. Paper products are mixed with water and turned into a slurry. If grease is mixed with paper, the oil will coalesce at the top of the slurry, and the paper fibers can't be separated from the oils, ruining the entire batch. And plastic milk bottle caps tend to get mixed in with glass, contaminating glass batches.

How do you know what you can recycle? Check your village's recycling program, because each program may have slightly different guidelines. Here's a list of items that are often Wish-Cycled, but according to Downers Grove and other nearby towns, these items should NOT be recycled:

- Paper: No paper plates, napkins, tissues, paper towels. Shredded paper can cause problems if it is loose, so put that in a closed paper bag.
- Cartons: No soiled pizza boxes, polystyrene foam (egg cartons, meat trays)
- Glass: No mirrors, window glass, Pyrex, dinnerware, ceramics, or light bulbs
- Metal: No needles, syringes, gas cans
- Plastic: No containers coded #6, or plastic take-out containers, cups, plates. Do not recycle plastic bags, packing peanuts, or Styrofoam.

Some frequently wish-cycled items can be recycled in other ways. Plastic grocery bags can be returned to most grocery stores for recycling. UPS stores accept packing peanuts. Goodwill takes household items and textiles. Check these web sites for places to recycle items that your village recycling program does not accept.

<http://www.dupageco.org/OnlineRecyclingGuide/>
<http://earth911.com/recycling-center-search-guides/>
<https://www.scarce.org/ongoing-reuse-recycle-at-scarce/>

Laurel Carlson, for the Caring for Creation Team