

Recycling Market FAQ

Why is the City considering the removal of plastic film from Saskatoon's recycling program?

As of Jan. 1, 2018, China, which buys approximately two-thirds of North America's recyclables, has established new standards which prohibit the importation of recovered paper that are overly contaminated with plastic film. The resulting decrease in market options and increased demand for higher quality recyclable materials means that Saskatoon's recyclers cannot sell all the material that they are collecting and are instead stockpiling a significant portion. Removing plastic film from the recycling programs will help reduce contamination and help ensure recoverable paper and plastic can get to market.

What do you mean by 'plastic film'?

Plastic film is commonly defined as plastic bags, wrap, and film that are usually marked HDPE (2) and LDPE (4). **A simple rule of thumb is if it stretches, it is plastic film.**

Does this mean people should stop throwing certain items in their recycling bin/cart?

City Administration is recommending that plastic film be removed from recycling programs, but no decisions have been made by Council.

If approved by Council, any program changes will likely take place on April 1, 2018. A targeted education campaign will coincide with this change. The City urges residents to keep contaminants out of their recycling by checking www.saskatoon.ca/wastewizard for acceptable materials. Residents may also want to consider reducing or discontinuing their use of plastic film by bringing reusable bags when shopping.

Are there any materials in Saskatoon's recycling stream that are being landfilled?

Yes. In 2017, both recycling service providers have had to landfill some plastic film. Plastic film comprises less than 2% of the material stream.

Black plastic is currently being landfilled due to no viable recycling options. Black plastic comprises 0.25% of the material stream.

As these materials make up a small percentage of the recycling stream, both recycling providers are still in compliance with the terms of their contract ensuring that 95% or greater of recyclables collected are actually recycled.

Is paper affected?

Paper markets have been impacted greatly by the recent contamination thresholds (maximum 1%) set by the Chinese government. North America has strong domestic markets for paper but with so many recyclers being forced to look at domestic markets, this has resulted in an oversupply. Paper mills are demanding higher quality (contamination lower than 1%) and may reject any loads they deem not compliant with their requirements. Plastic film, in particular, finds its way into bales of paper & cardboard to form the greatest source of contamination.

Is this affecting other municipalities?

Yes. Many other Canadian municipalities have been impacted by the new recycling standards being imposed by China. Some cities have had to stockpile material because they have been unable to find markets and some cities have had to landfill material due to no other viable option.

Are there other markets this material could be sold to?

Loraas and Cosmo use both domestic and international markets. New markets have opened up for recycling outside of China in countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand and India but competition is still high because many municipalities are competing to find new markets now that China has imposed strict quality standards.

Why doesn't the City ban plastic bags?

Administration will investigate other options for removing plastic film from the waste stream, this will include consideration of a plastic bag ban. Separate collection of plastic film may also be an option as a cleaner material stream may open up additional markets.

What can I do with my plastic film if I don't want to landfill it?

Several local retailers (including Coop, Sobeys, Walmart, and London Drugs) accept plastic bags for recycling. Visit swrc.ca for more information.

What can I do to help with recycling?

Keep on recycling!

- If approved by Council, program changes will likely not take effect until April 1, 2018 but you can choose to stop placing plastic film in your recycling container today.
- Try and use reusable bags and reduce the amount of plastic film you use.
- Reduce the amount of contamination you place in your recycling container and help the City get to a higher quality of material.

Where can I find out information on what's recyclable in Saskatoon?

Check whether items are recyclable by searching the waste wizard at:

www.saskatoon.ca/wastewizard