

## Contamination 101

### What it looks like and why it's important to address it

As recycling programs have grown and transitioned to single stream processes, recycling simply has become more confusing to consumers and WM has seen a significant uptake in contamination. Contamination in the waste stream increases the risk to WM workers, raises the cost of recycling, and hampers our ability to recycle effectively (and in some cases results in products not being recycled). By targeting the following items and preventing them from ending up in the recycling, we can clear up the waste stream, keep workers safe, and make a difference for recycling.

### Plastic Bags

#### What's the problem?

- **They interfere with the machinery** – WM workers have to enter clogged machinery in order to remove plastic bags. Bags jam up the screens that separate recyclables from other material meaning fewer recyclables are captured. The machines have to be cleared manually which is risky for WM staff.
- **They can make other recyclables look like trash**—Bagging your recyclables in plastic adds another step to the sorting process. Specialized labor is necessary to unbag these materials, making recycling a more expensive process. Additionally, if they are confused for trash, these materials cannot be recycled.



#### What to do:

- Place recyclables loose in your bin. Find out where you and your community can recycle plastic bags at [plasticfilmrecycling.org](http://plasticfilmrecycling.org).

### Non-Program Materials & Bulky Items (e.g. hoses, car parts, etc.)

#### What's the problem?

- **Cumbersome items have to be removed from the waste stream manually** – This can be risky for sorters and increases the labor costs of recycling, which raises the overall cost of recycling.
- **The equipment can't handle big heavy items** – They cause jams, break machinery, and can lead to plant shut downs, all of which limit WM's ability to recycle efficiently.

#### What to do:

- Check local programs for local reuse and recycling options first, before putting them in your waste bin. Visit [Earth911.com](http://Earth911.com) to find programs available in your area.



### Liquid and Food

#### What's the problem?

- **It contaminates the recyclables**—Food-soiled recyclables are less valuable to buyers, which increases the cost of recycling. Liquid and food that is released in trucks or in recycling facilities attracts pests that lead to unsafe working conditions.

#### What to do:

If available, put eligible items in the compost, otherwise use the trash container.

