



Could a Return to Dual Stream Collection of Recyclables Benefit Your Community?

While not financially or logistically feasible for all recycling programs, a return to dual stream collection from single stream collection would make sense and be beneficial for some local recycling collection programs. Currently, 73% of New Jersey's curbside recycling collection programs are single stream collection programs with the remainder being dual stream collection programs. These curbside collection systems, which are both well established in New Jersey, can be defined as follows:

Single Stream – A recyclable materials collection system wherein all bottles, cans, containers, and paper grades are mixed together in one bucket, bin or cart.

Dual Stream – A recyclable materials collection system wherein bottles, cans and containers are collected in one curbside bucket, bin or cart, while paper grades are collected in another bucket, bin or cart.

The Recycling Contamination Issue:

Recycling contamination occurs when non-acceptable items end up in the recycling stream. Non-acceptable items that are mixed in with commingled recyclable materials negatively impact the marketability and price of the recyclable materials collected.

Causes of Recycling Contamination:

Single stream collection systems are one of several recognized causes of recycling contamination. In the early 2000s, many recycling programs switched from dual stream collection to single stream collection, which unfortunately seemed to send a signal to some residents that they could put anything and everything in their curbside recycling bucket, bin or cart. While dual stream collection systems also experience their share of recycling contamination, they typically result in lower rates of contamination than single stream collection systems.

Reconsideration of Dual Stream Collection:

Stricter recyclable materials quality control specifications and recycling market fluctuations have led some in the recycling community to revisit dual stream collection. In fact, several municipalities in New Jersey and throughout the United States have discontinued their single stream collection systems and returned to dual stream collection systems over the last few years, where feasible.

Local recycling programs returning to dual stream collection systems must be sure to educate residents about the change in program requirements, consider implementing a curbside inspection program to ensure compliance, especially at the outset of the dual stream program, and secure the services of a recycling processing facility equipped to handle recyclable materials collected through dual stream systems.

Benefits of Dual Stream Collection Programs:

- Generate materials that are typically cleaner and more marketable than single stream collection programs.
- Keep paper separate from glass bottles, metal cans and plastic containers and therefore generate a recyclable paper mix that is significantly drier – and consequently more marketable – than the recyclable paper generated by single stream collection programs.
- Result in contamination rates that are typically significantly lower than single stream contamination rates.
- Reduce program costs since recycling processing facilities generally charge a lower processing fee due to the cleaner, more marketable condition of the recyclable materials collected.
- Result in recyclable material streams that may have a greater economic value and generate more revenue.
- Provide more stability when recycling markets are in decline since cleaner materials are in higher demand.



New Jersey Recycling Programs That Discontinued Their Single Stream Collection Program and Returned to Dual Stream Collection:

Borough of Oakland – Returned to dual stream collection in February 2018 – Increased costs associated with single stream collection led to the borough’s return to dual stream collection. The borough’s recycling newsletter informs residents that recyclable materials are valuable and marketable commodities that must be kept free of contaminants.

Township of Wyckoff – Returned to dual stream collection in July 2018 – Increased costs associated with single stream collection led to the township’s return to dual stream collection. “Dual is Cool” is now the slogan of the Township of Wyckoff recycling program.

Township of Montville – Returned to dual stream collection in February 2019 - Increased costs associated with single stream collection led to the township’s return to dual stream collection. The township uses their recycling website and Recycle Coach to educate residents about the dual stream collection program.

City of Hoboken – Returned to dual stream collection in September 2019 – A notice from the city stated that “global markets have made single stream recycling cost prohibitive” and that the return to dual stream collection could result in significant cost savings and a reduction in contamination in the recycling stream.

The Township of South Orange Village – Returned to dual stream collection in January 2023 – South Orange Village Trustee, Bill Haskins, summarized the advantage of the dual stream collection system: “By separating our commingled plastic, metal, and glass from paper and cardboard and alternating pickup weekly, we will decrease the contamination of both streams, making them more marketable, and ensure that more of what is recyclable actually gets recycled.”

Maplewood Township – Returned to dual stream collection in January 2023 - Maplewood Committeewoman, Nancy Adams stated that: “We really couldn’t continue with single stream and still manage costs, so we need the community’s help in making this dual stream process work to be more efficient and effective.”



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