

# UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES IN RECYCLING

## The China Syndrome



For many years, China has been the primary buyer of California's recyclables. Recently, China and many other Asian countries have imposed strict contamination standards and import bans, limiting the types of plastics and other commodities they will buy and requiring near-perfect sorting. These countries' strict demands have created a glut of materials, with few places to go — causing commodity prices to plummet.

At the same time, packaging is less valuable, with more single-use, flimsy, or combined materials, like metal and paper, together. With the changes in markets and materials, it's difficult for the recycling industry (and Burbank Recycle Center's sorting equipment) to keep up.

**Recycl-"able" vs. Actually Recycled**  
 Meanwhile, packaging often comes with false or misleading recyclability claims that don't match local realities. Many residents are confused about what goes into recycling bins and what doesn't. This lack of clarity leads to "wishful recycling" where non-recyclable items, such as chip bags, toys, packaging foam, or single-use coffee cups, are put in the blue cart with hope that they'll be recycled. (They won't be.) Contamination (from both non-recyclables and dirty recyclables) adds cost for recycling operators and further decreases commodity value and profitability. YOU can reduce contamination by knowing what is truly recyclable in Burbank and how to prepare it for the cart.



## Back to Recycling Basics

- Recycle clean paper, cardboard, glass, metal cans, and plastic containers, such as bottles, jugs, jars, and tubs.
- Not all plastics are recyclable! The City of Burbank only accepts #1, #2, and #5 plastic containers. Check plastic bottles and containers for the resin identification number inside the chasing-arrows recycling symbol.
- Follow the "less is more" rule when shopping. Is there a way to reduce disposable or problematic packaging? (Try bulk shopping.)
- "When in doubt, throw it out" to avoid "wishful recycling" — items one hopes are recyclable but end up as contaminants, such as toys.
- Always check the Recycle Center's Accepted Materials guide (available on the City website). Don't rely solely on package label claims or symbols. (For example: Milk cartons, juice boxes, and similar packaging may have a recycle logo on them, but they are not accepted for recycling in Burbank.)
- Keep recyclables loose in the cart. There is no need to bag your recycling. (Plastic bags are the top problem in recycling operations and result in the most contamination.)
- Shredded paper must be bagged, tied shut, and dropped off at Burbank Recycle Center. (This is the one exception to the plastic bag rule!)



**Keep in mind, market forces and new packaging challenges mean what is recyclable will continue to evolve. Check [BurbankRecycle.org](http://BurbankRecycle.org) or the Burbank Recycle Center's Facebook page for the latest updates on what is recyclable.**

Toys are not recyclable and are considered a contaminant. Please place old toys in the trash bin or, better yet, donate them.



**Shredded paper**  
 Bag and drop off at the Burbank Recycle Center.



## Other Recycle Bin Tips

- Keep caps on bottles. When caps are on bottles, both bottle and cap are recycled. Orphan caps become trash.
- Plastic take-out and produce containers marked with #5 are accepted for recycling. (Take-out and produce containers marked #1 are not.)
- Remove and discard plastic windows from paper envelopes and from boxes that held dolls or action figures.
- Glass bottles and jars are accepted in your curbside cart. However, it is better to drop off glass at the Recycle Center to prevent breakage and protect worker safety.



**Keep it loose!**  
 Don't bag recyclables in your cart!

### PROHIBITED:

## Recycle Bin Dirty Dozen

*Unless otherwise directed, these are trash:*

- **Cartons (milk, juice, soup, etc.) and juice boxes**
- **Disposable paper beverage or coffee cups**
- **Undesirable plastics**, such as toys, snack food wrappers, black plastics, and items marked with a #3, #6, or #7
- **Take-out food or produce containers** (unless marked with #5)
- **"Compostable plastics"** of any kind
- **Food and food residue** — As needed, wipe out or rinse items, such as yogurt cups.
- **Meal kit or grocery home delivery packaging** (Only the cardboard box is recyclable.)
- **Foam (EPS) or polystyrene plastic (#6)** products of any kind, such as red party cups, packing peanuts, packaging blocks, or food containers
- **Fabric, textiles, and clothing** (Repurpose or donate instead.)
- **Household glass**, such as windows, mirrors, picture frame glass, dishes, or glassware
- **Biohazards** — Diapers must go into the trash. Needles require special handling (see section above right).
- **Plastic bags** — Loose bags hurt recycling equipment and cause street litter during transit.

## Drop-Off for Hazardous or Problematic Waste

Never in recycling or trash!

- **Needles and Sharps** — Place needles and sharps in a red sharps collection box that you purchase at a pharmacy. Take your full container to the nearest S.A.F.E. Collection Center (see below).
- **Medications** — Unused prescriptions and other medications (tablets or pills) can be dropped off at the CVS Pharmacy, located at 511 Hollywood Way. Do NOT flush medications down the toilet or put them into the trash or recycling.
- **Tanks with helium, propane, or other gases** — Drop off at S.A.F.E. Collection Center (see below).
- **Paint** — Drop off at a local store participating in the PaintCare program. Visit [PaintCare.org](http://PaintCare.org) to find locations and other details.
- **Batteries, Electronics, Bulbs, and Used Motor Oil** — Drop off at the Recycle Center's Monday-Friday Drop Zone (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m., closed weekends) or at a S.A.F.E. Collection Center (Saturday and Sunday).



## Avoid the Spark

All batteries are hazardous waste — NEVER put them in the trash or recycling bins. Batteries must be dropped off at designated collection facilities, such as the Burbank Recycle Center or a S.A.F.E. Center. Improper battery disposal is the most common cause of fires at recycling facilities and in collection vehicles. Certain consumer batteries, like lithium ion (found in rechargeable tools and electronics), pose a risk if damaged or the terminals touch. These batteries, like rechargeables, small discs for hearing aids, and camera batteries, should be placed in plastic bags or the terminal ends taped to prevent a possible spark. Do not remove lithium ion batteries from your rechargeable electronic devices unless damaged and then place them into a plastic bag for drop off.



## Los Angeles S.A.F.E. Collection Centers

For household hazardous waste (HHW) and other items that aren't accepted for drop off at the Burbank Recycle Center or in your recycle or trash carts.

Saturdays and Sundays, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

Locations:

Northeast Los Angeles: 4600 Colorado Blvd., 90039

Sun Valley: 11025 Randall St., 91352

Photo credits: iStock/Getty Images Plus (cshqard); DNY59; iudimm; baylane; gji Images; Alex; MEd; Catalin205; the-lightwriter; urlingua; Mry-Jhee; kasato; s-c-s; Vachon; Rarphoto/Et; MMonticello; Pannathat; oster001; monkeybusinessimages; ebstock; stocksnapper; AnikaSalera