

Community Recycling Update: Paper and Plastic Cups Are Now Welcome!

Good news for your community: Waste Management (WM) now accepts paper and plastic cups in your recycling program! This exciting update is part of a national initiative with major brands and sustainability stakeholders to make to-go cups widely recyclable nationwide.

Why Does This Announcement Matter to My Community?

Your community plays a vital role in making this initiative successful. That means your community's recycling information on your website directly impacts whether cups can be recycled nationwide.

By updating your community's website to reflect this change, you are helping:

- Ensure consistent messaging across all platforms
- Reduce confusion for residents
- Empower your community to recycle more effectively
- Support a national sustainability effort that can benefit everyone

Why Are Paper and Plastic Cups Accepted Now?

WM is expanding the types of materials we accept to serve our communities better. Here is why paper and plastic cups are now part of the recycling stream:

- Brands are switching materials: Many companies are moving away from foam and adopting recyclable paper or plastic cups.
- WM upgraded its facilities: We are executing plans to invest over \$1.4 billion from 2022-2026 in new and upgraded recycling facilities with advanced sorting technology, which are expected to process material, including cups, more effectively and increase the capacity available to serve our customers.
- Demand for these materials is growing: U.S. manufacturers want recycled paper and polypropylene (PP) to make new products.

WM accepts hot and cold beverage paper cups (e.g., coffee cups with sleeves and soda cups), as well as plastic cups made from PP (e.g., cold drink cups for soda and iced coffee). Cups need to be emptied of all liquids, and straws, stoppers, and food must be removed. Foam cups, rigid polystyrene, lids, straws, and food are not acceptable recycling materials.

How do recycling centers know paper cups belong with paper?

Many modern recycling facilities use advanced optical sorting technology to improve how materials are identified and directed. Most WM facilities use a strategically placed optical sorter just before the container line to detect fiber-based items, including paper cups, and redirect them into the paper stream.

While paper cups are technically three-dimensional (3D) objects, their behavior during sorting depends on their physical condition:

- Crushed or flattened cups mimic two-dimensional (2D) items and are sorted with other fiber materials.
- Uncrushed cups may initially follow the container line path, but optical sorters can still identify and recover them as fiber.

Ultimately, the system is designed to recover paper cups, regardless of whether they follow a 2D or 3D sorting path, ensuring they are correctly sorted into paper bales and sent to mills for recycling.

Where do Recycled Cups Go?

Paper cups are accepted by mills like Pratt, Smurfit Westrock, and Sonoco, while recycled paper cups can be turned into:

- Cereal boxes
- Facial tissues
- Corrugated boxes
- New paper cups

Recycled plastic cups can be used to make:

- Paint cans
- Plastic lumber
- Pallets
- Crates
- Garden products

Tools like the [Paper Mill Statement](#), the [Recycling End Markets Interactive Map](#), and others provide transparency and insight into the growing network of recovery options across North America. Visit recyclefsp.org/end-markets to explore the data and see how access to recycling continues to expand.

How Can We Work Together to Make Cup Recycling a Success in Your Community?

WM has already taken big steps to make recycling paper and plastic cups easier for residents. We have updated our [Recycling Right website](#) and educational materials to reflect this exciting change, including:

- Easy-to-understand posters and flyers
- Step-by-step guides on how to recycle cups properly
- Updates to local WM.com sites so residents get accurate, localized information