

**JULY 2024**

# **RANDOM, RESTRICTIVE RECYCLING**

**THE CHAOTIC SYSTEM ON  
LONG ISLAND AND THE POLICY  
SOLUTION NEEDED TO FIX IT**







Inside the SIMS Municipal Recycling Facility | Image via Sim

# OVERVIEW

## Background

Each year, Long Island generates more than 2.9 million tons of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW), with approximately 40% of that waste being packaging and paper products, such as plastic containers, metal cans, plastic film, glass bottles, paper products, and cardboard. Unfortunately, only about 20% MSW is being recycled properly, with the rest being disposed of in an environmentally and economically taxing manner.

Large brands have externalized the cost of

disposing of and recycling packaging onto our municipal recycling programs and local taxpayers. The logistically challenging and costly burden of recycling is forced onto the shoulders of municipalities, while corporations take no responsibility for the billions of packaged products that they create. The solid waste and recycling crisis is estimated to cost New York local governments over \$400 million annually. Local officials across Long Island and NYS have been forced to consider raising fees on residents and/or reducing the recycling services provided to their communities.





## Recycling in New York is Inconsistent, Confusing, & Misleading

What and how you recycle depends on the community in which you live. This can vary significantly from community to community, thus creating a great deal of public confusion. This confusion leads to “wish-cycling”—the disposal of consumer waste in a recycling bin in hopes of it being recycled, when in reality, it cannot be recycled. Wish-cycling leads to increased contamination in the recycling stream and increased costs for local governments.

The public is often misled by the presence of a recycling symbol (three chasing arrows) on the product packaging—this does not mean that it is accepted by your community’s recycling program. More and more often, corporations are using the recycling symbol for marketing purposes (aka greenwashing), when the product is actually not recyclable locally.

When it comes to plastics, many communities use the number inside of the recycling symbol (known as the resin identification number or

RIC) to determine which products are accepted/recyclable in their program (others are moving away from this, referring more to the size and shape of a plastic item). Simply because an item has a RIC, does not mean that item is accepted in your local recycling program.

Furthermore, while some communities indicate that they accept a certain number of plastics, that does not mean that they accept all materials with that number. For example, some Long Island communities in this report indicate that they accept #4 and #6 plastics, although they DO NOT accept certain types, including plastic bags (#4 plastic) and Styrofoam containers (#6 plastic). Additionally, black plastics are usually not recyclable. Black plastics blend in with conveyor belts and do not reflect light, meaning that they cannot be identified and sorted by the optical scanners used at recycling facilities. There is also currently no market for recycled black plastic. Black plastic cannot be recycled into any other color plastic which decreases its value as a material. Therefore, black plastic items simply end up in landfills rather than being recycled.



# Recycling by the Numbers

The number found on the bottom of plastic items will range from 1-7. The following is a sample list of common "recyclables."

#1

Orange juice bottles (e.g. Tropicana), water bottles (e.g. Smart Water, Poland Spring, Evian, Vitamin Water, Essentia, Fiji), Iced tea bottles (e.g. Gold Peak, Snapple), sports drink bottles (e.g. Gatorade), salad dressing bottles, mouthwash bottles, peanut butter jars, cooking oil containers, hand sanitizer (e.g. Purell), dish soap bottles (e.g. Dawn, Ajax, Palmolive), shampoo bottles (e.g. Garnier Fructis, Whole Blends, Dove, Ogx), vitamin/pill containers (e.g. CVS Ibuprofen, Centrum Multigummies, One A Day), hand soap bottles (e.g. SoftSoap), some body wash bottles



#2

Milk jugs (e.g. Hood), coffee creamer (e.g. Delight), body wash bottles (e.g. Old Spice, Aveeno, SoftSoap, St. Ives, Axe), detergent bottles (e.g. Downy, Tide, Gain), shampoo bottles (e.g. Head and Shoulders, Dove, Native, Aveeno, Cantu), cleaner bottles (e.g. Lysol Cleaner and Bathroom Spray), motor oil containers, disinfectant wipe containers (e.g. Lysol)



#3

Cleaner bottles, clear food wrap, garden hoses, fencing, shower curtains, yogurt drinks (e.g. Chobani), stain remover containers (e.g. OxiClean)



#4

Plastic grocery bags, bread bags, squeezable bottles and lids (e.g. Heinz), dry cleaning bags, shrink wrap, frozen food bags





## #5

Plastic straws, yogurt containers (e.g. Chobani, Yoplait, Siggis, Oikos Pro), disposable cutlery, plastic yard furniture, margarine tubs, shampoo bottles (e.g. L'oreal), body scrub containers (e.g. Tree hut), rice pudding containers, pharmaceutical bottles (e.g. CVS liquid acetaminophen, Tums), pet treat containers (e.g. Temptations), dishwasher pods containers (e.g. Cascade), glue bottles (e.g. Gorilla Glue), powder mix containers (e.g. Nesquick), personal care products (e.g. Vaseline, Aquaphor), drink bottles (e.g. Pedialyte), snack cups (e.g. Kraft mac and cheese), candy tubes (e.g. Skittles), mini red party cups



## #6

Styrofoam (e.g packaging, egg containers), yogurt containers (e.g. Chobani Flip, Oikos Triple Zero), disposable cutlery, red party cups, clear plastic drinking cups, cleaner packaging (e.g. Swiffer wet cloths)



## #7

Drink bottles (e.g. Arizona), air fresheners (e.g. Febreze), liquid water enhancers (e.g. Mio), water jugs, DVDs, some food containers, most plastic baby bottles, some clear plastic cutlery, body washes (e.g. Victoria's Secret), dog food (e.g. Caesar loaf and topper)



## Electronic waste


Electronic waste, or E-Waste, describes any discarded piece of electrical equipment. These instruments are often environmentally destructive when disposed of improperly. However, recycling practices for e-waste materials are not as commonplace as other types of recyclables. Different municipalities recycle E-Waste in different ways, whether it be a regularly scheduled E-Waste recycling pickup, dropping it off at a facility, or at a special event.



# What can be Recycled?

Municipalities across Long Island all have separate recycling programs, differing in what materials are accepted and how they are accepted. Listed below is what is accepted in each town, each city, and certain villages on Long Island.

	Metal	Glass	Plastic #1,2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	Carboard/ Newspaper	E-Waste
Town of North Hempstead	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Town of Hempstead	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D*
Town of Oyster Bay	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	D*
Town of Huntington	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	D*
Town of Babylon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	D*
Town of Smithtown	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Town of Islip	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Town of Brookhaven	✓	D	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	D
Town of Riverhead	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	D
Town of Southold	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Town of Shelter Island	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Town of East Hampton	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Town of South Hampton	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Village of Garden City	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D*
Village of Hempstead	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Village of Patchogue	✓	D	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	D
Village Port Jefferson	✓	D	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	D
Village of Northport	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Village of Flower Hill	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Village of Brightwaters	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓
Village East Hampton	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Village of South Hampton	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D
Village of Amityville	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	D*
City of Glen Cove	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	D
City Long Beach	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	D

 Accepted by curbside pick-up

**D** Accepted by drop-off at local recycling center

**D\*** Accepted by drop-off or call for special curbside pick-up



# What can and can't be recycled in your bin?

Although municipalities may take many different types of recyclables, these items are not always recyclable locally. Some products may have the chasing arrow symbol indicating it is recyclable and a municipality may generally accept this type of plastic/glass/metal/paper, but in actuality, they are not accepted in curbside

bins. This is a general list of products that are typically accepted and not accepted, although it is extremely important to check with local municipalities for specific recycling information in your community. Additionally, while not accepted in curbside bins, clean film plastic can and should be recycled—certain retail stores and most grocery stores in NYS are required to collect film plastics from customers for recycling.

Material types:	Plastic	Metal	Glass	Paper
Accepted:	Plastic bottles and containers (#1-2 always accepted, #3-7 depend on municipality)	Tin/steel/ aluminum food and beverage cans	Glass bottles and jars	Newspapers, magazines, office paper, paper bags, cardboard, packaging boxes, junk mail
Not accepted:	Film plastics (plastic bags, bread bags, dry cleaner bags), bottle caps, black plastic, foam plastic #6 (Styrofoam including egg cartons, packaging, and more), plastic cutlery and straws, DVDs and CDs, bioplastics including "biodegradable" bags, plastic food and beverage pouches (yogurt, applesauce, baby food, etc.)	Scrap metal, paint cans, industrial uses of metal	Broken glass, windows, mirrors, light bulbs, ceramics, glassware (glass cups, plates, etc.)	Wax paper, frozen food boxes, soiled cardboard or paper (e.g. pizza boxes) hardcover books, receipt paper, napkins/ paper towels/ tissues

*\*general list; always check local municipalities for specific recycling instructions*

## What Needs to Change

Senator Pete Harckham announcing The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act going through legislation. "The only way we can begin to mitigate the growing issue of waste pollution, which threatens our natural resources, is for the initial producers of this waste to be fully involved with the end-of-life solutions. Right now, municipalities and taxpayers are footing practically all of the enormous costs of product packaging pollution and recycling, and that's neither fair nor viable in the long run."

said Senator Harckham, chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee.





# SOLUTIONS

## Know Before You Throw:

What and how you recycle depends on where you live. Cities, towns, and villages across Long Island have different recycling guidelines, therefore an item accepted by your local recycling service may not be accepted in other areas. Be sure to avoid “wish-cycling” and *know before you throw* by using the guidelines provided by your community. Check out the Recycle Right NY website for more information on the dos and don'ts of recycling: <https://recyclerightny.org>

## Adopt Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for Packaging and Paper in New York State:

While it's important for individuals to make informed decisions, ultimately, the only way to solve our recycling crisis is through a major policy change that holds product manufacturers responsible for managing their waste throughout its lifecycle. This policy, known as EPR, is a key recommendation to create a circular economy in DEC's NYS Solid Waste Management Plan. A strong EPR policy will help improve recycling, protect our environment, and create a circular economy in a number of ways, including, but not limited to:

- Mandating the overall reduction of packaging and paper waste. The cheapest and most environmentally friendly option is to avoid creating the waste in the first place!
- Shifting the cost of recycling from local governments to the product brand owners—currently, cash-strapped local governments are reducing recycling services and are unable to invest in needed infrastructure.

- Establishing a minimum recyclables list, which will provide more consistency from community to community, thus reducing confusion among the public and subsequent wish-cycling.
- Incentivizing producers to increase the recyclability of their product packaging, by using materials that have consistent markets and can be sorted and processed locally.
- Conducting a consistent, statewide public education campaign. Public education is critical to ensure the public *knows before they throw*.
- Setting strong mandates for minimum recycling rates and post-consumer recycled content standards, which will provide accountability for increasing recycling and support strong markets for recycled materials.
- Removing toxic chemicals from packaging. We can not have a sustainable circular economy while continuing to use dangerous chemicals in our packaging.

In New York State, EPR legislation known as the **Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act** is being considered by the state legislature. After several years of debate, it is past time for New York State to adopt this critical legislation.

**THANK YOU TO  
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