

Recycling Contamination Reduction Kit

5 Steps to Replicate The Recycling Partnership's Feet on the Street Cart-Tagging Campaign in Ohio.

If you are looking to clean up your residential recycling stream, this kit will provide you everything you need to get started. As you will see, the approach is well tested, and the results are both immediate and noteworthy.

This kit has been designed to provide steps, tools, and resources to help you improve the quality of your curbside recycling program. It will require resources, planning, and time on your end, as well as a partnership with your materials recovery facility (MRF) and hauler, but the benefits are many:

- Increase the quality of the recycling stream
- save on disposal fees
- improve program satisfaction
- improve the capture of quality recyclables

This will help ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the recycling system.

To get started, use this [Assessment Tool](#) to make sure your community is ready to take on this challenge. Before starting this project, you'll need to assess your [Budget](#), present your case to [decision makers](#), and get buy-in from your community officials, your hauler and your MRF. Lastly, take advantage of what others have learned by reviewing the pro tips throughout this kit.

PRO TIP

It will take 6-8 weeks of preparation to set up this program. Consider this when setting your launch date. Review the [Checklist and Timeline](#) prior to starting to get an idea of the steps you will need to be successful.

PRO TIP

Convene all the relevant stakeholders during the planning phase. This program is much more powerful when community staff, decision makers, the MRF and hauler(s) are all on the same page.

THIS TOOLKIT INCLUDES:

- Guidance to help you broach this subject with your community leadership, MRF and hauler
- Free customizable outreach materials for educating your community
- Tools to help you plan, implement, track, and report out results
- Pro Tips to help you get the best results

Kick-Start Improved Recycling

This is not your typical education and outreach campaign. The tools in this kit were developed, tested, and refined in partnership with communities, states, and other organizations across the country. In Ohio, these communities included; Columbus, Akron, Cincinnati, Fairfield, Gahanna, and Centerville. It focuses on dual, complementary strategies: education and direct feedback at the curb. **Combining education and direct feedback at the curb is a best practice and will achieve the best outcomes.**

Proven results from implementation of this kit have included:

- Increased value of recyclables per ton
- Increased capture of quality recyclables
- Increased awareness and general recycling knowledge
- Overall contamination decreased dramatically
- The most problematic contaminant, which was specifically targeted, trended downward
- The number of contaminated carts notably decreased

While it might be tempting to implement only a portion of this kit, success hinges on implementing the entire approach. Why? As an example, in 2016 we deployed only the education component in one community and saw no significant changes to overall contamination or the specifically targeted issue (bagged recyclables) in that community. We tried various iterations of the “Feet on the Street” program with the best and fastest results coming from the recipe of all the critical ingredients.

Implementing this kit will not only help kick-start a better-quality material stream, but it will also allow you to isolate problem areas on your routes and target the carts that need attention. It provides a process to address the problem materials that create inefficiencies and added expenses in your program.

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ARE YOU READY?

Use this [Assessment Tool](#) to see if your community is ready for the fight against contamination.

ASSESSMENT TOOL



click links for related documents

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: IMPROVING QUALITY

Surveys show that most people want to recycle correctly, but when tested, they don't actually know how. Use this kit and [checklist](#) to help recyclers do the right thing.

PREP: 6-8 Weeks



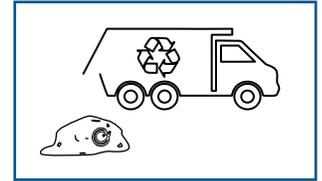
Gather key facts from your MRF and hauler.



Prep your outreach materials (shown below).



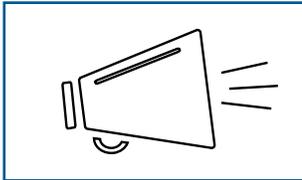
Identify and train staff.



Track contamination before implementing the "Feet on the Street" program (with an inbound audit, system audit, or MRF grading tool).

IMPLEMENT

INFORM



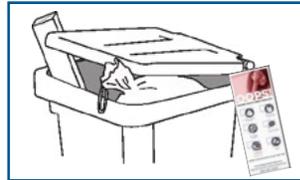
Deploy outreach materials to households and provide program details to partners, community leaders, and other interested groups.

ANNUAL INFO CARD



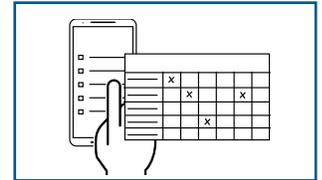
People need to know what is recyclable as well as what isn't. **Mail an annual info card** to give them an easy reference guide to your basic YES and NO lists.

CURBSIDE FEEDBACK



Direct feedback is extremely powerful in changing behavior. Train staff to use Oops Tags.

GATHER DATA



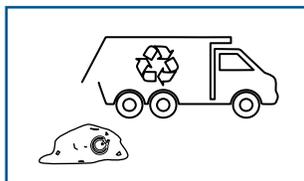
Gather data at the curb including set-out rate, participation rate, tagging rate, and contamination observed.

TOP ISSUE MAILER



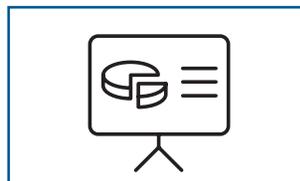
Target your most problematic contaminant by **mailing a Top issue postcard** two collection cycles after the annual info card.

TRACK



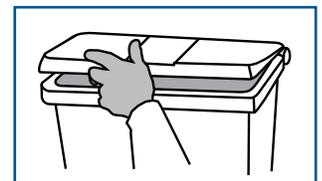
Track contamination after the "Feet on the Street" program.

SHARE RESULTS



Share results with partners including the MRF and hauler, and community members and leaders.

MAINTAIN



Continue to spot **check carts and educate** households about contamination.

Open lines of communication with your MRF and hauler are critical. Speak with them to discuss their most recent list of acceptable materials and find out the biggest problem materials in your recycling stream.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

[MRF SURVEY](#)

[MRF GRADING FORM](#)

- Your recycling hauler contract
- Your MRF contract (if separate from hauling)

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Set up a meeting with your MRF and hauler.

- 1 Use this [MRF Survey](#) to guide your discussion and narrow down the top five problematic materials. (You'll highlight these in many of your communications tools.) This is also a good time to verify that the MRF accepts the items listed on your current outreach materials.
- 2 Name the top contaminant. This will become the central focus of your work to improve quality.
- 3 Ask the MRF to periodically assess your contamination rate if this is not already addressed in your contract. You will need to agree on the assessment method and the frequency. Get a baseline contamination rate so you can measure against it later and [track](#) your progress.
- 4 Ask your hauler about rejecting carts that have been tagged for contamination. Tagging and rejection of carts is the most impactful aspect of this program. Also, ask what time the collection crews start. You will want your inspection crews to be 1-2 hours ahead of the collection trucks to ensure inspections occur before the trucks arrive.
- 5 Identify what your hauler can and cannot do to assist with the effort. Make sure to build in time to meet with collection drivers regularly throughout the project. You will want to make sure they understand the goal and how important they are to the success of the program.

PRO TIP

Review your hauler and MRF contracts for relevant clauses.

Material audits, education, and enforcement may already be built in for you to implement. Further, review the [Guide to Community MRF Contracts](#) and remember that written contracts are a fundamental best practice.

PRO TIP

A capture rate study will help you identify how much trash is in your recycling, and how much recycling is in your trash. This is the best way to measure your progress and find opportunities for improvement. You can do your own study by taking 50 trash and recycling containers at random, sorting and weighing the contents, and doing the math. Or you can hire a specialized firm to do it.

→ STEP 2: Prepare Your Communications



A consistent and clear message is important to ensure residents understand their job as recyclers.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

CAMPAIGN BUILDER

BUDGET

CHECKLIST AND TIMELINE

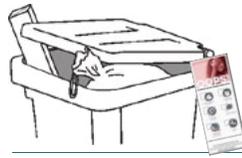
- Mailing addresses for every household you service
- Your logo and preferred contact information

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Customize your [outreach materials](#).



Annual info card mailer. Verify that the acceptable materials and top contaminants are accurate (or make adjustments), then customize, print and mail these cards to every household in your city or target area. Your GIS or Planning Department should be able to provide you with mailing addresses, and the local post office or your printer may be able to help through specific mail carrier routes. Use our [Printing and Mailing Specs](#) to help prepare for your mailing. Consider using some of the budget to buy a newspaper or radio ad, or boost posts on social media.



Curbside feedback. Customize and print Oops Tags to use on routes. Make sure the top contaminants are clearly represented. Use our [Printing and Mailing Specs](#) to help calculate how many tags will be needed for your program.



Top issue mailer. Customize, print and mail these to households two collection cycles after the annual info card was received.



Top issue signage. Support the top issue mailer with reminders, which should be put out when the mailers are sent, and leave out for at least 6 collection cycles. A-frames, billboards, bus ads, and posters at local stores all work well, as do social media posts and ads.

Budget for deploying outreach materials.

Speak to your local printer and/or sign maker for an estimate of costs and don't forget to add it to your [Budget](#) spreadsheet.

[See Step 3](#) for more on staffing.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

CHECKLIST AND TIMELINE

CAMPAIGN BUILDER

PRO TIP

Refer to the [Checklist](#) often to ensure you are maintaining your timeline.

BEST PRACTICES

Campaign Builder. The best option for creating a FREE, downloadable, ready to print, and easy to change annual info card and top issue postcard for your program can be found through our [Campaign Builder](#).

For a successful and sustainable recycling program, your outreach must continue beyond this Feet on the Street program.

Website. It's likely that most residents visiting your website are looking for information on how to properly handle a particular item. Providing easy search functions for that information will help ensure that item does not become contamination. Or consider adding an image of your annual info card to your website. Consult with your MRF to ensure accuracy.

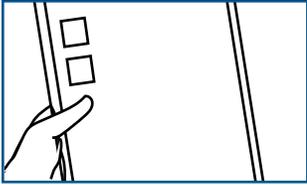
Social Media. Make use of social media and your website to remind your community how to recycle better. Look to The Recycling Partnership's [Social Media Kits](#) for posts, images, and ideas. Link to images and videos showing tangles and plastic bags causing issues in MRFs to drive the point about worker safety and the harmful effects of contamination.

DIYSigns. Sign up for [DIYSigns](#) to explore additional signage you can customize and download to show what recyclables go in which bin.

PRO TIP

Take the time to **speak with people at the curb** and have talking points ready for all staff. Figure out a message that resonates with your community, and when they ask why you are doing what you are doing, have those messages top of mind. See our [Customer Service FAQs](#) for some ideas.

Resident education alone will not improve your recycling stream. Curbside feedback is key to improving quality because it reinforces the rules and helps recyclers know what they are doing wrong... and right!



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

[STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES \(SOP\)](#)

[INSPECTOR SUPPLIES LIST](#)

[JOB DESCRIPTION](#)

- A meeting with your hauler
- Staff to inspect carts/bins
- A training session for staff

PRO TIP

Work with your hauler to get them involved.

Chances are that drivers already know which households are the worst offenders. Closely examine your hauler contract, looking for anything about educating or enforcing.

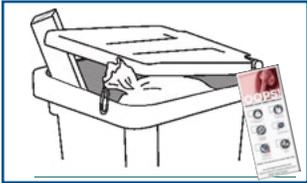
WHAT YOU'LL DO

- 1** First, develop a strategy and discuss with your hauler. Will you be rejecting carts the first time you tag them? The second time? How far is your municipality willing to go to enforce? Will you use Thank You Tags for those who fix the problem?
- 2** You'll need staff (Quality Inspectors) to inspect carts or bins and tag for the items listed on your Oops Tags. To save on labor expenses, look to existing staff, volunteers, and your hauler first, followed by temp workers. Estimate 5 to 8 hours for one staffer to cover a standard 1,000 household curbside route. Use our [Staffing Guidance](#) and [Sample Job Description](#) to help build your team of Quality Inspectors.
- 3** Use these [Training Slides](#) to train staff and drivers on procedures. Be sure to set a standard for rejecting carts—do you draw the line at a single contaminant, or does it take a more notable amount? Consistency is key. As a best practice, complete at least one walk through (soft launch) of each target route with all Quality Inspectors for training purposes.
- 4** Set procedures for staff to use Oops Tags at the curb. Here are some simple [Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\)](#) to help guide your team through easy-to-follow steps used by successful programs across the country. Beyond these, factor in community and route specifics.
- 5** Explore the possibility of your hauler fulfilling these duties, either now or once your contamination rate is under control. They could even play the role of backup, looking for anything that other Quality Inspectors missed. At the very least, drivers should leave rejected carts at the curb.

PRO TIP

Worried about complaints? Some communities are concerned that telling residents that their cart will not be serviced due to contamination will result in a significant number of complaints from residents. Participating communities have not reported this as an issue but rather the questions and phone calls were more positive from residents. Most wanted to know more about the recycling program and what can and can't be recycled.

This toolkit is designed to help you give recycling the equivalent of a pool shock—hit it hard with everything you’ve got to clean the system. Keep it up for at least four collection cycles, then scale back to a less intense quality control program or develop a program maintenance plan to maintain results experienced during your “Feet on the Street” campaign.



WHAT YOU’LL NEED:

[CUSTOMER SERVICE FAQs](#)

[PROGRAM OVERVIEW](#)

- Prelaunch meetings with hauler, MRF, and internal staff

WHAT YOU’LL DO

- 1 Double check that your mailers are correct, orders have been placed, and your staff has been trained.
- 2 Tell your MRF and hauler your start date so everyone is aware that you are ready to launch.
- 3 Inform decision makers and front-line staff, and anyone else who may interact with your community about the details of this program.

In addition, give them a specific answer to:

Q: Why is the city doing this?

A: To protect the health and safety of workers and the recycling system.

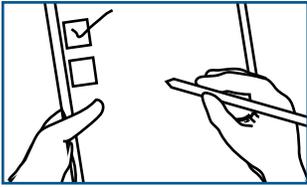
Use our [Customer Service FAQs](#) and [Feet on the Street Overview](#) to help develop and address questions about the program.

- 4 Launch.
- 5 Prepare for the next phase—program maintenance—which should include continued dialogue with your MRF and hauler, regularly spot-checking recycling containers, and semi-annual communication with residents about the most problematic materials.

PRO TIP

For mailings, talk to your local post office about door-to-door distribution. Postal staff may have options to reduce costs, and this will help ensure that your mailing gets to all households. See also our [Printing and Mailing Specs](#).

There's only one way to measure success, and that is to collect accurate data.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

[MRF GRADING FORM](#)

[MANUAL TRACKING FORM](#)

- A spreadsheet, notebook, tally counter, and/or tracking app and mobile device or other means of recording data

NOTE

If a specific route is consistently producing lots of contamination, look for clues in the field.

For example, in Memphis, TN, their contamination team realized several households had broken trash carts and were using recycling carts instead. Watch, listen, learn, and act.



The Recycling Partnership strongly recommends tracking your annual contamination and program performance data using the Municipal Measurement Program (MMP), as a way to see trends year-over-year. Learn more at municipalmeasurement.com.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Track these basic metrics to monitor the effects of this program.

Contamination rate. Work with your MRF to get this on a regular basis, and review contract language to check quality requirements, thresholds and measurement plans. Check out the [Guide to Community MRF Contracts](#) for more information on how to incorporate contamination language into your MRF contract.

Participation rate. This is a key metric to measure and if you are conducting a "Feet on the Street" program it would be a great time to gather this data. Participation rate is typically defined by how many households set out recycling at least once in a 30 day period.

Curbside set-out rate. On each route, capture set-out rates (the number of households actually setting out recycling on a collection day divided by the total number of serviced households on that route).

Curbside tagging rate. On each route, record the number of Oops Tags you leave (including warning or rejection). If you choose to use Thank You Tags for households who have corrected recycling mistakes, record these as well. Customize this [Manual Tracking Form](#) to capture all of the pertinent details.

You can track these on paper and clip board or consider using a phone or tablet based app—several are commercially available.

Don't forget to let the residents know how the program changes are going! Keep them up to date and thank them for their patience and help in creating a cleaner recycling stream. Consider a press release, social media post, or interview with your local news outlet.

KEEP YOUR FEET ON THE STREET PROGRAM GOING

A successful recycling contamination reduction program is not just a "one and done" project that solves all contamination issues. Each "Feet on the Street" project is meant to be an intensive "shock" treatment. A well-planned and consistent preventative program, including education and operational practices at the curb, will help maintain low contamination rates.

Use the data gathered throughout the program to fine tune your educational messaging. Use participation and set-out rates to increase engagement and divert more material.

Spot checking carts or another round of tagging and outreach may also be needed. Don't forget to keep the critical feedback loop going between the MRF, hauler and community.

This is where you'll find all of the worksheets referenced throughout this document. If you'd like to download the full set with one click—this is [here](#).

PLANNING/STAKEHOLDER

[Checklist and Timeline](#)

Use to plan the “Feet on the Street” project and ensure the project is staying on track

[Assessment Tool](#)

Use to determine if your community is ready to conduct a “Feet on the Street” program

[MRF Survey](#)

Use to align the community and MRF on acceptable and unacceptable lists

[Budget Calculator](#)

Use to estimate the cost of the “Feet on the Street” program

[Presentation to Inform Leadership](#)

Use to educate and inform leadership about the “Feet on the Street” program

EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS

[Printing and Mailing Specs](#)

Use to work with printer/ mailing companies on printing and mailing needs

[Communications Plan](#)

Use to develop a plan for education and outreach throughout the “Feet on the Street” program

[Feet on the Street Overview](#)

Use to explain and overview of what the “Feet on the Street” program is

MEASUREMENT TOOLS

[Manual Tracking Form](#)

Use when an app is not available to use to collect data at the curb

[MRF Grading Form](#)

Use to visually inspect loads and provide feedback on quality of the material by truck/route

TAGGING TRAINING TOOLS

[Inspector Supply List](#)

Use to equip the inspection crew with the correct materials to conduct “Feet on the Street”

[Staffing Guidance](#)

Use to plan the size and type of inspection crew to hire

[Sample Job Description](#)

Use to hire inspection crew

[Customer Service FAQs](#)

Use to answer any questions residents or internal staff may have about “Feet on the Street”

[Training Presentation](#)

Use to train up the inspection crew on conducting “Feet on the Street” program

[Tagging Standard Operating Procedures](#)

Use to guide the inspection crew on how to conduct an inspection at the curb

OTHER

[Case Studies](#)

Use to review outcomes of other communities that have conducted “Feet on the Street”