

Recycling audits show high level of contamination

(Penticton, BC – Aug. 30, 2022) – Is Penticton getting a bad wrap for its recycling skills? A summer audit of local households has discovered that more than half of the recycling carts contained an item that shouldn't belong.

"Today, we enjoy door-to-door recycling service for \$34 per year. If the contamination remains at current levels, we run the risk of paying more for this service and losing the convenience of the service we have," says David Kassian, the City's Sustainability Supervisor.

Penticton's goal is to lower our community's recycling contamination rate, currently sitting at 13 per cent, to at least 5.8 per cent by year-end, falling in line with Recycle BC requirements. Recycle BC is a not-for-profit organization that manages residential packaging and paper recycling throughout British Columbia.

If the City does not improve its contamination rates, it could lead to increased costs to deliver the program as a result of fines from Recycle BC. It may also lead to a less convenient recycling service, such as having to sort everything into separate bins or bags, which has been shown to reduce contamination in other B.C. communities.

This summer, the City hired two Recycling Ambassadors who were tasked with randomly inspecting local recycling and yard waste bins during summer, as well as conducting public outreach to help educate the public about the items that can – and can't – go in their carts. Here is what they found:

- Of the 2,000 curbside recycling bins checked, 54.1 per cent contained a non-recyclable contaminant. Of the contaminated bins, 83.6 per cent contained some kind of soft plastic packaging, 13.2 per cent contained glass, 15.9 per cent contained Styrofoam, and 28.8 per cent contained paper towels or tissues. Other commonly found items included plastic padded envelopes, clothes hangers, non-recyclable plastic household products such as toys, plastic dishware or totes, and recycling contained within plastic bags.
- Roughly 185 multifamily recycling containers were checked. While many bins had acceptable levels of contamination, all contained some form of contaminant. A total of 90.7% contained some type of soft plastic, 36.6% contained glass, 31.7% contained foam packaging, 18.6% contained garbage, 8.7% scrap metal and 2.2% had soft or hardcover books. Many of the bins also contained textiles, household products that are non-recyclable (such as toys, plastic dishware, fans or totes) items contained within plastics bags.

“If we can keep the clothing, soft plastic, glass, Styrofoam, books and disposable paper products like paper towels and tissues out of the recycling bins, it will go along way towards our goal,” said Kassian.

Many of the common recycling cart contaminants, including soft plastics, glass and foam packaging, are accepted at depots for recycling. Also, electronics and small appliances can be recycled at PACE Electronics Recycling. A list of depot locations can be found at penticton.ca/recycling.

“Recycling is something we can each do every day to reduce our impact on the environment,” said Penticton Mayor John Vassilaki. “These audits have given me the information I need to improve recycling in my household and I hope every household will take the time to do their part. Come on Penticton, we can do it!”

Residents who are not sure where items go are encouraged to try the Recycling Wizard tool at penticton.ca/recycling or call the Recycling Hotline at 1-800-667-4321. More information on what can and cannot be recycled will also be shared in the latest episode of the City’s PenTALKton podcast Episode 6 - Recycling: Does Penticton have a bad wrap?

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