

Changes in the Recycling Industry

Starting in the early 1990's, the United States began sending most of its recycled items to other countries to be made into new products and sold into the world economy. At this time, the United States started implementing multi-stream recycling practices for their recyclables. Multi-stream recycling refers to the process of separating recyclables by material type prior to collection. This system worked great because it reduced contamination, but it discouraged people to recycle because multiple bins were needed, and people had to separate the recyclables themselves.

Fast-forward and the multi-stream recycling practice was widely replaced by single stream recycling due to growing markets for recycled items. Single stream recycling encouraged people to recycle more because it required only one bin and people didn't need to separate the recyclables, but it did unfortunately cause an increase in contamination.



As single stream recycling practices continued, people began to confuse what could be recycled. The countries that were buying the recycled items started noticing increased contamination and therefore the recycled items could not be made into new products and sold. This situation caused many cargo ships full of recycled items to be turned away and sent back home to the U.S.

Simultaneously, these countries started to develop economically and demand for recycled items decreased since these countries could now produce and sell their own products. Since the demand is decreasing, it is more important than ever that AACPS keeps its recycled items clean and dry and free of contamination. If there is too much contamination, the items will go to the landfill and never be recycled.