

## Americans' wish-cycling method threatens industry

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**Elkridge, MD** - American efforts to recycle are getting trashed. According to [CBS News](#), many people are recycling items that shouldn't be recycled, causing cross-contamination with trash and threatening the recycling industry.

China, the world's biggest buyer of recycled materials, stopped importing many salvaged goods from the U.S. in 2018 because the materials were too contaminated. To prevent further contamination, China has since stopped accepting goods that aren't 99.5 percent pure, uncontaminated material.

The contamination of recycled materials has led some communities to end their [recycling programs](#). Other programs have cut back on the types of salvaged goods they accept.

But why are people recycling trash? Because of "wish-cycling."

"Wish-cycling" is when someone isn't sure whether something can be recycled or not. Instead of throwing away their questionable item, the person throws it into recycling hoping that it can be recycled.

Wish-cycling has increased since recycling became more mainstream and now 25 percent of recycling is actually trash. Dirty food containers that haven't been rinsed out, paper plates, and styrofoam are just a few of the items that have been recycled when they shouldn't be.

Styrofoam, in particular, is costly to recycle and isn't eco-friendly. The foam can break down into tiny pieces and pollute waterways and streets. Maryland is actually the first state that would ban [styrofoam containers](#) altogether.

Americans are also having problems deciphering which types of paper can be recycled. Up to [17 percent](#) of everything printed is considered waste and can be recycled, but other types of paper such as paper plates, paper towels, napkins, and tissues aren't.

"Just in general, recycling can be so confusing that people just don't take it seriously," said Mitch Hedlund from [Recycle Across America](#).

Recycling often ends up at a sorting facility where workers try to catch the items that shouldn't be recycled. On the presort belt, workers look for "tangles," which are items that can get caught in the sorting equipment like plastic bags, coat hangers, and garden hoses.

Other recycling programs refuse items like plastic film, foil, golf balls, egg cartons, yogurt cups, and shampoo bottles.

Recycling is still an important part of going green in the United States. Climate change is an ongoing problem that's been causing temperatures to rise, important insect populations to drop, and [pest populations](#) to climb. The Canada goose population alone has increased substantially in just the [last 50 years](#).

But for recycling to help combat climate change, it's important that Americans learn how to do it effectively. "When in doubt," said Mike Taylor, manager of recycling operations in Elkridge, MD, "throw it out."

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