



Colorado material recovery facility survey, spring 2019

Background

Non-recyclable waste, also known as contamination found in the recycling stream has always been problematic for recyclers. After China enacted the “National Sword” policy and stopped accepting certain recyclable materials and set stringent contamination limits, contamination has become an even bigger issue for material recovery facilities (MRFs) across the country and in Colorado.

To help address contamination concerns, The Recycling Partnership (TRP) created a MRF survey to assess which contaminants are most problematic for facilities. Based on these survey results, governments or material processors can build custom recycling educational materials to address the top contaminants in a localized area. Check out TRP’s free, custom campaign builder at:

<https://recyclingpartnership.org/pdf-builder-intro/>

The Materials Management Unit (MMU) at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) sent The Recycling Partnership’s contamination survey to MRF’s throughout Colorado in February, 2019. We hope the results presented in this report can be used to educate the public on how to reduce contamination in recycling. Outreach materials for the top contaminants, as indicated by survey results, are included as an appendix.

Respondents

The contamination survey was sent to 22 Colorado MRFs. Of those facilities, **12 responded and ranked the top five most problematic contaminants for their facility.** Only MRF’s that process residential recyclables using curbside collection were selected. Data was obtained from a mix of urban and rural counties, with varied responses for the top contaminants.

Problematic materials

Plastic bags were the most problematic contaminant for facilities when judged by the most number one rankings (Figure 1). Food/liquid in containers and batteries also received several

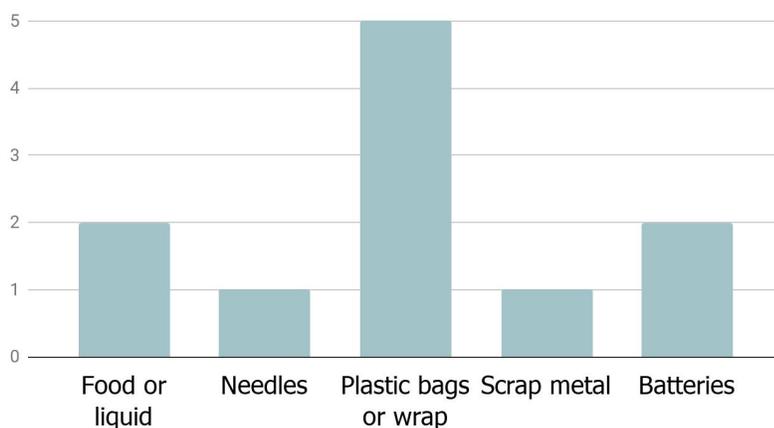


Figure 1: Materials ranked as the most problematic for facilities

number one rankings each. For the 12 facilities that responded, plastic bags or bagged recyclables earned the most votes overall, closely followed by food or liquid and tangles (Figure 2).

The results show that plastic bags are by far the most problematic and most common contaminant Colorado MRF’s must manage. Food and liquid contaminated recyclables also prove to be problematic for facilities. Additionally, tangles (such as hoses

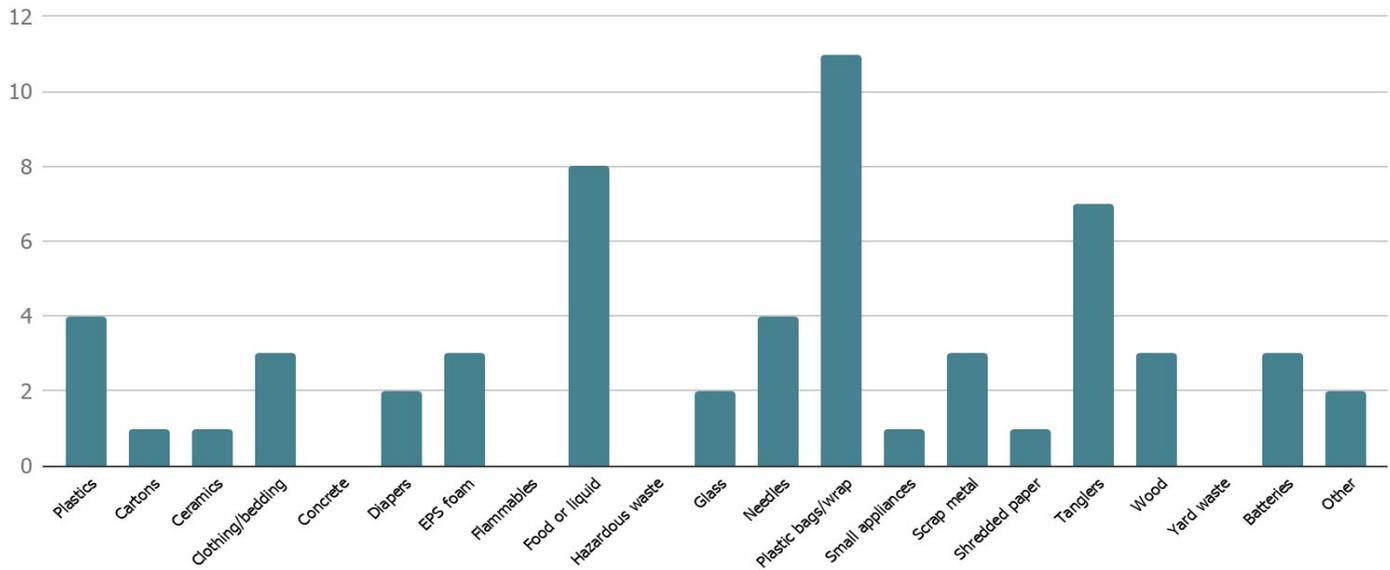


Figure 2 : Contaminants (combined from Top 5 rankings per facility)

or strings of lights) gained several votes but no respondents indicated this material class as the most problematic. When examining overall votes, batteries have a relatively small amount with only a total of three votes. When examining materials by votes for the number one most problematic material, however, batteries stand out with two votes. This is likely due to the fire hazards from rechargeable batteries.

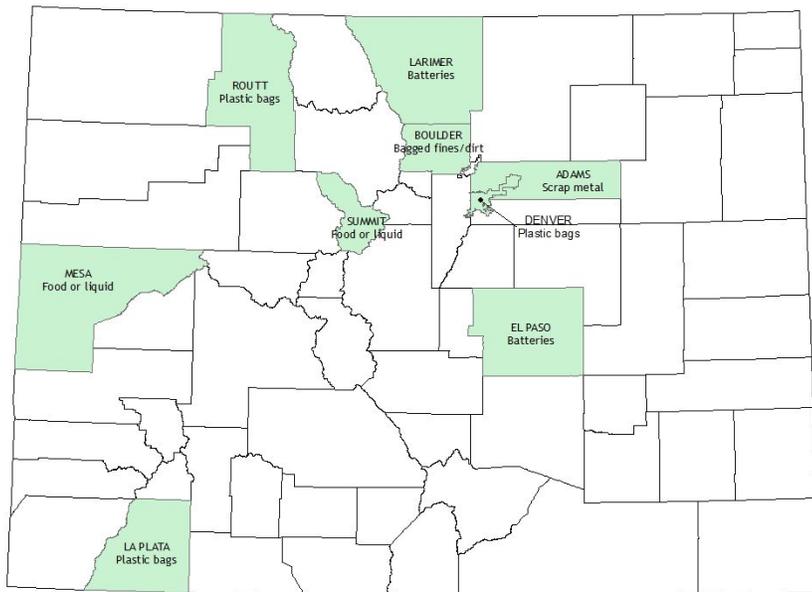


Figure 3 (left), displays the counties where survey respondents are located and the top contaminant for the facility or facilities within that county. One facility indicated needles as their top contaminant. That facility is not displayed as the correct location is unknown, but this MRF is in either Weld or El Paso county.

These survey results show that contamination does vary, yet plastic bags and bagged recyclables are problematic to some degree for all MRF's that responded to this survey.





COLORADO

**Hazardous Materials
& Waste Management Division**

Department of Public Health & Environment

Appendix 1: Outreach materials

We have provided outreach materials below for recyclers and communities looking to educate residents on contamination. Resources are available for the top contaminants, including plastic bags and food/liquid contaminated containers. These educational outreach materials can be distributed as mailers and/or posted online using your social media account.

NO PLASTIC BAGS IN THE RECYCLING CART



DO NOT BAG Recyclables

Collecting recyclables in a bag? Empty the contents into the cart.



Return plastic bags to retailers.



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Department of Public
Health & Environment



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IT'S
ALL YOU
RECYCLE



NO FOOD OR LIQUID IN THE CART

EMPTY ALL CONTAINERS BEFORE RECYCLING.

Food and liquid can ruin other recyclables.



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