

# DON'T TANGLE OR CONTAMINATE RECYCLE MORE FOR A GREENER STATE



## DEFENDING RECYCLING

Quick training guide for those defending recycling to elected officials, other governing bodies and the media.

### WHAT THE ELECTED OFFICIAL MAY SAY:

"We don't have to provide recycling for our citizens."

### WHAT THE PUBLIC MAY HEAR

"Recycling isn't mandatory."



**THE FACTS/A BETTER MESSAGE:** Beginning with Senate Bill 111 in 1989 and in subsequent legislation, the North Carolina General Assembly established disposal bans on a wide range of materials, including plastic bottles and aluminum cans, which make up a large segment of the household recycling mix. As recycling of these items is mandatory, each community should provide a non-landfill option for easy to recycle items such as plastics (bottles, tubs, jugs and jars), metal (all cans), glass (bottles and jars) and paper (paper, cartons and cardboard). The state of NC has grant programs available to every community in North Carolina to help fund recycling programs. The state of NC also provides common recycling guidelines and educational materials for each community to help educate their citizens.

### WHAT THE ELECTED OFFICIAL MAY SAY:

- "We can't charge residents more for this service."
- "No one cares about recycling; people don't want to do it."

### WHAT THE PUBLIC MAY HEAR

"I thought I wanted to recycle, but now I am not so sure. Maybe recycling is a waste of time, energy and money."



**THE FACTS/A BETTER MESSAGE:** Americans love to recycle and love the convenience of single stream. Your residents demand this service. However, this is more than a service that the public demands. It is our responsibility to reduce waste in the landfill, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, care for our environment, protect public health, support industry, develop domestic markets and in-state jobs, and reclaim resources that would otherwise go to waste.

### WHAT THE ELECTED OFFICIAL MAY SAY:

"There's no market for recyclables since China isn't an option anymore."

### WHAT THE PUBLIC MAY HEAR

- "Why were we shipping to China in the first place? That doesn't sound sustainable or environmentally responsible!"
- "Recycling in America is over."



**THE FACTS/A BETTER MESSAGE:** **We do have markets for recycling in America.** American markets traditionally require increased sorting for a higher quality material. That's a good standard to support! We need to do two things: reduce contamination and develop more domestic markets. We can rebuild recycling the right way. We can enhance local markets that North Carolina has been developing for decades and send even less recycling overseas. When markets recover and commodity prices increase, we will keep more money in our state and waste fewer resources with transport.

## WHAT THE ELECTED OFFICIAL MAY SAY:

- “Contamination is inevitable. You can’t decrease it.”
- “Education and outreach doesn’t work.”

## WHAT THE PUBLIC MAY HEAR

- “The public doesn’t know how to recycle.”
- “Why am I doing this if others are messing it up?”
- “We will never learn how to do this right!”



**THE FACTS/A BETTER MESSAGE:** Education works. Education helps reduce recycling contamination. Data shows that contamination can drop significantly with just an eight week curbside outreach campaign. **Domestic markets + educating the public + single stream + enforcement = awesome results!** Using only one outreach technique just once is not an education strategy and will likely fail. Instead, be consistent, comprehensive and constant with your recycling education and outreach efforts. Investing in ongoing anti-contamination education programs will reduce the cost of contamination.

## WHAT THE ELECTED OFFICIAL MAY SAY:

- “Landfilling is cheaper than recycling; let’s just send it there.”
- “We shouldn’t have to pay to get rid of recyclables.”
- “Recycling isn’t profitable.”

## WHAT THE PUBLIC MAY HEAR

- “Recycling is really trash, and that’s where it will all end up.”
- “It doesn’t matter where I put recyclables.”



**THE FACTS/A BETTER MESSAGE:** There’s always a cost to managing waste, regardless of where you put it. When we don’t reclaim a resource through recycling, we are losing the value of that resource while paying to bury it in a landfill. Recycling reduces the need for harvesting virgin materials and keeps toxic materials out of the landfill. Recycling is a commodity, not garbage. Commodities fluctuate in value. Relying on recycling revenues to cover the program’s full cost is risky and unsustainable. Historically, markets recover. We shouldn’t abandon the infrastructure we have spent decades developing just because markets are down. That would be a tremendous loss of time, energy and money.

## WHAT THE ELECTED OFFICIAL MAY SAY:

“I don’t have the budget to keep this program.”

## WHAT THE PUBLIC MAY HEAR

“My fees are going up.”



**THE FACTS/A BETTER MESSAGE:** The only utility we don’t expect to pay for is recycling. It’s time to restructure the way we fund recycling programs. Budgets should cover the full cost of collection and processing. When markets are good, rebates can be passed back to the local government to further enhance the program.

## WHAT THE ELECTED OFFICIAL MAY SAY:

- “Recycling is broken.”
- “Single stream recycling doesn’t work.”

## WHAT THE PUBLIC MAY HEAR

“Recycling never worked to begin with and can’t be fixed.”



**THE FACTS/A BETTER MESSAGE:** **Recycling participation and recycling tons skyrocketed when we switched to single stream.** We may have had a cleaner stream before, but only a few dedicated citizens were recycling. Single stream without education leads to contamination and wishful recycling. To recycle right, we have to educate and enforce.

