

Recycle at home

DATA PREVIEW

2014-15 Single-family recycling and waste composition studies

The evolution of recycling in our region

Recycling saves energy, reduces air and water pollution, reduces greenhouse gases, and conserves natural resources.

Curbside collection of recyclables makes recycling convenient. This service has been a key element of recycling programs in the region since 1983, when the Oregon Opportunity to Recycle Act required communities throughout the state to provide curbside collection.

Within the region, weekly recycling collection is the service standard for single-family households. However, some communities have moved to every-other-week collection of mixed recyclables and monthly collection of glass.

Recycling makes it possible to use materials that would otherwise go to the landfill to make thousands of products. A successful recycling system depends on the quality of material collected at the curb. A key goal of these studies is to help ensure that we continue to generate the best and most marketable recyclable materials through our collection programs, while also providing accessible and cost-effective service to the public.



In March 2015, Metro completed two studies to assess the performance of the region's single-family household recycling programs to inform regional policies and programs. More than 300,000 pounds of household garbage and recycling were collected and sorted for these studies.

Study 1: Curbside recycling program performance

This study looks at the amount of curbside recyclables in garbage carts and compares the performance of less frequent recycling collection programs to weekly collection programs.

Study 2: Contaminants in recycling

This study looks at the amount of items not recyclable curbside, known as contaminants, that are in recycling carts and compares the performance of less frequent garbage collection to weekly collection.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Recycling performance: There may be opportunities to reduce the amount of recyclables in garbage carts and reduce contamination in recycling carts.

Recycling service: There was no statistical difference in the aggregate comparison of weekly recycling collection to every-other-week collection. However, there were more curbside recyclables in the garbage in communities with monthly glass recycling collection than in communities with weekly or every-other-week glass collection.

Garbage service frequency: There was no statistical difference in overall contamination in recycling carts when comparing weekly garbage collection to every-other-week collection. There were differences for some specific materials.

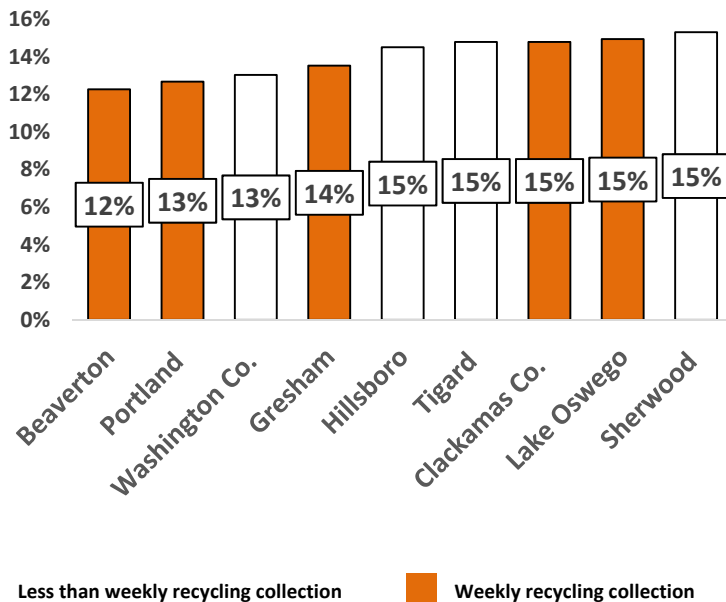


STUDY 1: CURBSIDE RECYCLING PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

The study looked at the amount of acceptable curbside recyclables found in the garbage cart. Overall, the study showed a regional average of 14 percent curbside recyclables in the garbage cart. The three types of less frequent programs had 13 percent to 15 percent recyclables in the garbage cart. Overall, monthly collection programs had the highest percentage of recyclables in the garbage cart.

These percentages indicate that approximately 36,000 tons of curbside recyclables, including paper, plastic bottles, aluminum cans and glass containers, are disposed in garbage carts each year. Recycling these materials would reduce the same amount of greenhouse gas emissions as taking 22,000 passenger vehicles off the road.

Curbside recyclables in the garbage carts



□ Less than weekly recycling collection ■ Weekly recycling collection

LOOKING AHEAD

Working together, Metro and its city and county partners will use this study, along with other information, to answer the following questions:

- Should the region work on reducing the amount of recyclables in the garbage? If so, how do we best do that?
- Should the region work to reduce the amount and types of contamination found in recycling carts? If so, how do we best do that?
- Should less frequent recycling collection programs be a generally accepted practice in the region? How might this affect the entire system of collecting recyclables, yard debris, food scraps and garbage?

STUDY 2: CONTAMINANTS IN RECYCLING

Items found in recycling carts that aren't recyclable at the curb are collectively known as contaminants. Contamination likely has a variety of causes, from lack of knowledge about what's not recyclable to lack of space in the garbage cart.

Overall, the study showed a regional average of 9 percent contamination in recycling carts. This amounts to more than 9,000 tons of contaminants in recycling carts annually.

The study compared the City of Portland's every-other-week garbage service to the rest of the region's weekly garbage service. The study found that there was no statistical difference in overall contamination between weekly and every-other-week garbage collection. There were differences for some specific contaminants.

- **Plastic bags:** Plastic bags are found in recycling carts across the region, with non-Portland samples showing more bags than Portland samples. Plastic bags jam up sorting machinery at processing facilities, increasing the cost of converting recyclables into new products.
- **Rigid plastics:** These plastics were one of the most common contaminants found in carts region-wide. Many plastics are not recyclable curbside because there are no stable markets for them.
- **Diapers:** Diapers are found in recycling carts across the region, with Portland's samples showing more diapers than in non-Portland samples. Diapers pose health hazards for workers who collect and sort recyclables. They also soil paper and other materials, preventing them from being recycled.

For more information on the studies:

Metro is currently previewing the data and results with local government partners and interested parties. Metro will release a final report on the studies in summer 2015.

To learn more about the studies, please contact Rosalynn Greene at 503-797-1521 or e-mail rosalynn.greene@oregonmetro.gov