



### The Carton Council Position on Contamination

China's bans have driven an increased focus on contamination, with a particular emphasis on ensuring purity in bales. Contamination happens when non-recyclable items – like diapers, plastic bags and wrap, metal wires and hangers, garden hoses, clothes and batteries – are mixed in with recyclable materials.

When residents, who may have the best of intentions, try to recycle these items, it can cause headaches that go beyond problems with purity standards. Contamination can damage equipment at materials recovery facilities (MRFs), cause potential safety hazards for workers, and threaten the recycling industry by dirtying the quality materials that should be recycled, like food and beverage cartons, aluminum cans and plastic bottles, paper and cardboard.

Food and beverage cartons made mainly from paper, a renewable resource, contain some of the highest-quality fiber in the recycling stream. This commodity is recyclable and should not end up in landfills. [The Carton Council](#) encourages facilities and communities to ensure cartons are included in their recycling programs and lists of recyclable materials. Cartons should not be considered a containment.

To get the highest value, we recommend facilities sort cartons into their own grade (Grade #52). New technology utilizing artificial intelligence is helping to efficiently separate cartons, and there are steady, growing [end markets](#) available for Grade #52 cartons. When sorted into Grade #52, cartons are turned into tissues, paper towels, writing paper or eco-friendly building materials.

If not sorted into Grade #52, cartons are likely flowing into mixed paper, which isn't optimal for achieving the highest quality and value for cartons.

The Carton Council has resources to help communities include cartons in their recycling programs and ensure carton recycling is happening efficiently and effectively. Additionally, we are proud to work with other industry groups, like [The Recycling Partnership's Fight Contamination Initiative](#), to help ensure that residents are recycling right and that valuable materials are not ending up in landfills.





### **The Carton Council Recommendation on How to Recycle Cartons, Straws and Caps:**

Food and beverage cartons are sorted most efficiently when they retain their original shape, so there is no need to crush or flatten them before recycling. They should be empty of any remaining product, as with any other recyclable, and the caps can be left on.

For cartons that come with straws, the Carton Council recommends pushing the straw back into the carton after consuming the product to help ensure it will not end up as litter and won't contaminate other materials. The carton straw and carton cap do not impact the end markets consuming Grade #52 cartons.

### **FAQs About Straws/Caps/Flattening/Rinsing:**

**Q:** Should I crush my carton before putting it in the recycling bin? Do I need to rinse it out?

**A:** Empty any remaining product, and that's it! No need to heavily rinse or crush. Cartons are sorted more efficiently when they retain their original shape, so you shouldn't crush/flatten them before they are put into the bin.

**Q:** Can I recycle the caps on cartons? What about the straw?

**A:** Yes and yes! Once you've emptied the remaining product, put the cap back on the carton and/or push the straw in to ensure both items get recycled and don't end up as litter.

**Q:** My recycling facility says they don't accept straws.

**A:** While many programs do not accept loose straws, pushing the straw into the carton ensures it will not end up as litter. When the carton is sorted at the MRF, the straw remains inside and thus is not able to contaminate other materials and can be accepted at end markets for Grade #52 cartons