



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

SINGLE STREAM RECYCLING

Single Stream recycling refers to the technology that allows residents to place ALL of their recyclables—newspaper, cardboard, paperboard, plastic, glass, aluminum and steel—into one container for collection. With this type of collection methodology there is no need to separate paper from containers because all sorting takes place at a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). Single Stream recycling is the next best thing when it comes down to curbside recycling collection. A bonus with Single Stream, besides being easier for everyone participate, is that recycling collection is cheaper (compared to dual-stream). Many communities across the United States are switching to Single Stream technology because of the greater potential to collect more recyclables at a lower cost and sell for a higher price.

Everyone that has access to curbside recycling in Niagara County has access to Single Stream. All of our recyclables are sent to private MRFs, such as the Allied Waste Services (now Republic) MRF in Kenmore and Buffalo Recycling Enterprises in Buffalo, which combined can process a total of 750 tons of recyclables each day! Waste Management Recycle America is also in on the action; they have a MRF in Liverpool, NY where recyclables are transported, sorted and sold using Single Stream technology.

Single Stream recycling has come at a real opportune time. Over the last decade there has been a significant increase in the volume and types of packaging waste used and consequently thrown away. Specifically, this includes single-serve items such as water bottles, sports drinks and basic packaging materials for consumer goods like a plastic bag or shoe box. As packaging materials have increased in use, so has the demand for feasible recycling opportunities. Single Stream recycling is capable of separating each recyclable out and preparing it for sale to buyers for use in new products!

The Skinny on Single Stream

We have said that Single Stream is both cheaper and better....here is why. The old way involved haulers separating paper recyclables from containers and putting it (paper) in a separate compartment of the truck. Everything else is placed in another compartment on the same truck. With Single Stream, everything from your recycling bin can go into one compartment on one truck, like a garbage packer truck, and gently smushed together. By spending less time at your curb and having a greater truck capacity, the collection costs are lowered!

Another advantage to Single Stream is that it is like a spring board for greater recycling participation. When something is neat and cool, everyone wants to do it, and Single Stream is pretty neat and cool! Not to mention, the technology behind Single Stream recycling expands the

menu of acceptable items. The sorting technology used at Single Stream MRF's is so advanced that items that were previously deemed un-recyclable are now recyclable, such as plastic bags, wide mouth plastic containers, and different paper types. With Single Stream recycling, nearly 40% of the waste we generate in our homes can be put into our recycling bins!

How does it Work?

Once the materials you set out in your recycle bin arrive at the Single Stream MRF, they are dumped and loaded onto conveyors and sent through a series of automated processes that sort, screen, separate and bail all of the materials by type. For example; all PET plastic, like water and soda bottles are separated and bailed independently, as are all aluminum cans, newspapers and cardboard. Follow the links below to watch how recyclables are separated at a Single Stream MRF; Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko18FSDQTsk&feature=related> Part 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_5kPa6XiZw.

Wrap Up

It's only fair to mention that, like anything new, Single Stream does come with some downside. The issue is glass; when everything is combined together the glass breaks and gets imbedded in with paper. The paper mills that buy the paper from Single Stream MRFs don't want the glass, which decreases demand for single stream paper products and disrupts the exchange of commodities from MRFs to paper mills to end users. It may take some time and patience to work this kink and a few others out.

Single Stream programs provide a new local dynamic that may be pivotal at increasing our locally anemic recycling rates. Often the launch of these programs is followed by an up-tick in recycling participation and materials. In the next few years we will be able to determine if Niagara County has embraced the Single Stream concept. For now, just fill up your bins with recyclables to participate! If you don't know what goes into your bin; e-mail us at recycling@niagaracounty.com and tell us where you live in Niagara County and we will e-mail you a list of acceptable items for your bins! Or visit www.rethinkyourwaste.com to download a poster of acceptable items in your community.



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