

Recycling to Change in 2019

FAQs and Answers

Why do we need to change our recycling process? Mt. Lebanon along with 18 other SHACOG (South Hills Council of Governments) municipalities bid jointly for waste hauling, including recycling. There were three bidders for the five-year contract that will go into effect in January 2019. Waste Management will be the new contractor beginning in January. The contract includes changes to the recycling program; namely they will no longer accept plastics numbered 3-7 or glass of any kind as part of the recycling collection.

For years, we have been asked to recycle as much as possible to keep materials out of landfills. Why recycle less? The market has changed; some materials that previously were recycled and turned into useful things are no longer of value in large quantities. Even more important, contamination has become a huge problem. The Pacific Rim nations that typically buy our recyclables will no longer accept loads containing more than ½ percent (0.5%) contaminated material. Ships with contaminated materials exceeding that threshold are being turned away, with the materials likely landing in landfills anyway.

What contaminates a load? Many well-intentioned people do not recycle correctly. Some people will put greasy pizza boxes or dirty containers into the single-stream recycling bin or they throw in prohibited items such as Styrofoam or bottle caps. The biggest contaminant, however, is glass, which can shatter into small shards and ruin an entire load. Shattered glass embeds into other recyclable materials (such as cardboard or paper), making those other items unable to be recycled.

When will these changes be implemented?

The new regulations will go into effect on January 1, 2019. It is never too early to start changing your recycling habits. The municipality recommends cleaning all items and checking the numbers on all plastic items before placing them into the recycling bin.

What items will we be able to continue to recycle as usual? You may continue to recycle aluminum (beverage) cans, clean aluminum foil and bakeware, steel and tin cans (soup, veggie, coffee); corrugated cardboard, office paper, magazines (matte and gloss), junk mail, newspapers, paperboard (cereal type boxes, gray on one side), poly-coated paperboard containers (non-plastic milk and juice containers) and phone books. You also may continue to recycle clean, empty plastic jars, jugs and containers (without lids), but only those with the numbers 1 or 2 on the bottom. Clean is very important, as partially filled soda bottles can contaminate an entire load.

What items that we previously recycled are no longer acceptable?

You may not put glass of any type or color into the recycling bin or plastics 3-7. Plastics 3-7 typically are softer plastics. Plastic grocery bags and plastic trash bags are especially problematic, as they can become entangled with machinery and shut down an entire plant. As a rule of thumb, do not recycle any plastic material that is pliable enough to wrap around your finger. Always check the number on the plastic container before you place it in the recycling bin.

What things have never been accepted for recycling? The following items have always been banned: food waste, pizza boxes (generally due to grease) paper towels, bathroom trash, yard waste, Styrofoam, light bulbs, window glass, mirrors, batteries, ceramics or dishes, cellphones, computers or electronics, hazardous waste containers, clothing, garden hoses, batteries, or oil containers. **Note:** *some of these items can be recycled at Mt. Lebanon or Allegheny County recycling*

events for electronics, hazardous waste and yard waste. For specifics go to <http://www.mtlebanon.org/2385/Curbside-Recycling>.

What will happen if residents do not recycle correctly? In 2019, Mt. Lebanon's focus will be educational. *Mt. Lebanon Magazine*, social media, LeboAlerts and other outreach efforts will aim to gain compliance from residents. Beginning in 2020, however, the municipality will be charged \$150 for every load the recycling plant deems contaminated—a potential penalty to taxpayers of more than \$250,000 each year. Residential recycling bins that are clearly contaminated might not be collected.

How will recycling less impact the environment? Recycling the right way as opposed to recycling more could be beneficial, as much of what people now think is being recycled is going into landfills anyway. People may want to rethink their purchasing habits, choosing items that are packaged in recyclable containers, if possible. Residents should take advantage of special local and regional recycling events and look into other places that accept things such as grocery bags and glass, which cannot be part of curbside single-stream recycling collection. The municipality will investigate alternatives elsewhere in the county as options for people who are willing to transport and drop off items that are not accepted by our hauler.

Where can I get further information?

Please stay tuned to Mt. Lebanon Magazine, the municipal website www.mtlebanon.org, the Mt. Lebanon Magazine website lebomag.com, Mt. Lebanon Facebook page, cable channels 17 and 34 and for LeboALERTs with additional information over the coming months.