Rethink waste
South Bayside Waste Management Authority
A Public Agency

Cleaner Together

Global recycling markets have radically shifted! Read on to see how you can help.

INSIDE:

What goes in the blue, green and black carts!

&

How to recycle unique items like old lights, batteries and mattresses.

BY ANNE STOKES

Get to Know RethinkWaste

Recycling is easy but RethinkWaste still needs your help

Who We Are

Since 1982, RethinkWaste has worked to keep a big portion of San Mateo County clean from maintaining public health standards for our ratepayers and strong environmental integrity in our community. The Shoreway Environmental Center, located in San Carlos off Highway 101, handles nearly 500,000 tons of recyclables and waste materials each year. Nearly 95,000 households and 10,000 businesses from Burlingame to East Palo Alto rely on the Shoreway Environmental Center to provide cost-effective services, including recycling, organics and solid waste collection.

For 435,000 ratepayers in the 12 cities and public agencies that comprise RethinkWaste, this team approach offers many benefits.

Improved efficiency

By owning and operating the Shoreway Environmental Center — **which is comprised of two facilities, the Shoreway Transfer Station and the Shoreway Recycling Center** — RethinkWaste has direct control over costs. For example, the facility provides garbage companies a centralized transfer station to process garbage, which is more efficient and cost-effective than sending individual trucks to the landfill.

The 16-acre site also receives and sorts 80,000 tons of recyclable materials annually at the Shoreway Recycling Center, which are then marketed and made into new products domestically and globally.

Local Representation

As a $100 million regional public agency, the 12 member agencies of RethinkWaste have a bigger voice in the market and when interacting with the state than if they spoke separately. RethinkWaste's annual operations are skillfully guided by 12 experienced elected officials (see below, right) who provide staff with important direction and represent the best interests of the community.

Shared resources

Waste management is expensive. By sharing costs, all member agencies are able to provide residents with comprehensive services. Through RethinkWaste, member agencies are able to pool both financial and professional resources to control costs, comply with strict environmental laws and meet common visionary community goals.

Valued partnerships

RethinkWaste also manages contracts with Recology San Mateo County to collect materials and South Bay Recycling to handle and sort them at the Shoreway Environmental Center.

RethinkWaste needs your help to keep reusable resources out of landfills and is asking you to recycle correctly. Residents need to follow RethinkWaste's CartSMART program, putting recyclables, food waste and garbage into the appropriate blue, green or black cart. When garbage gets mixed with the recycling, all of the recyclable materials can become unsellable and must be landfilled.

Most importantly, residents should reduce the overall amount of waste they generate.

"Avoid waste in the first place, make smart decisions about products and materials that you buy and insist upon recycled-content materials," said Joe La Mariana, RethinkWaste Executive Director.

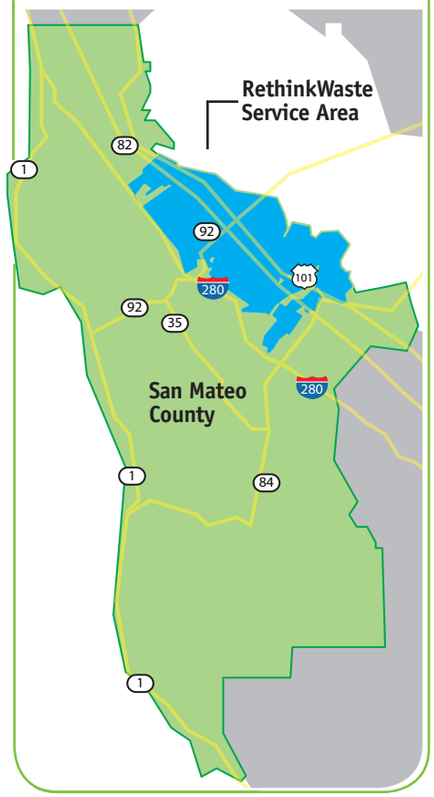
Keep reading to learn more ways you can do your part to ensure RethinkWaste can continue to keep communities clean.

> *"Avoid waste in the first place, make smart decisions about products and materials."*
> **Joe La Mariana**
> *Executive Director, RethinkWaste*

WORKING TOGETHER

RethinkWaste is a regional solid waste and recycling agency that is made up of 12 member agencies in San Mateo County. Each agency has an elected official on its board to develop strategic direction and management oversight. In return, RethinkWaste provides professional staff and solid waste management expertise to its member agencies.

Where is RethinkWaste?



RethinkWaste Member Agencies & Board Members

ATHERTON
Vice Mayor Bill Widmer

BELMONT
Vice Mayor Davina Hurt

BURLINGAME
Mayor Michael Brownrigg

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Supervisor Carole Groom

EAST PALO ALTO
Council Member Donna Rutherford

FOSTER CITY
Council Member Charlie Bronitsky (Board Chair)

HILLSBOROUGH
Council Member Jess E. "Jay" Benton (Board Vice Chair)

MENLO PARK
Council Member Catherine Carlton

REDWOOD CITY
Council Member Alicia Aguirre

SAN CARLOS
Mayor Bob Grassilli

SAN MATEO
Mayor Rick Bonilla

WEST BAY SANITARY DISTRICT
Board Member Fran Dehn

BY ANNE STOKES

Where Does It All Go?

Hilary Gans and the South Bay Recycling staff at Shoreway Environmental Center can't catch every item that has been recycled incorrectly in the facility, which is why residents need to recycle right!
PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR.

How RethinkWaste keeps the community clean

For many people, once their garbage is hauled away, it's a mystery where it all ends up. How do recyclables end up as new products? Who sorts everything? What ends up in the landfill?

The Shoreway Environmental Center, a 16-acre site in San Carlos, processes all waste materials generated in the RethinkWaste service area at its two facilities. Each day, RethinkWaste handles 75 tractor trailer loads of waste materials, sending garbage to local landfills and recyclables overseas or to domestic manufacturers for reuse.

Shoreway Transfer Station

At the transfer station, organic waste from green carts and garbage from black carts are dumped out and reloaded onto large trucks. From there, garbage is sent to the landfill while organic waste is transported to area composting facilities. Residents can get free compost made from their own green waste at these facilities!

Shoreway Recycling Center

All of the recyclable materials from blue carts — paper, plastics, glass and metal — are sorted at the materials recovery facility (MRF), also known as the Shoreway Recycling Center. Each year, RethinkWaste processes around 80,000 tons of recyclable materials at the MRF. Those materials are then marketed to manufacturers to be made into new products.

Sorting at the MRF is a combination of mechanical processes and human hands. According to Hilary Gans, RethinkWaste Senior Facilities and Contracts Manager, the facility's $17 million computer-controlled system sorts materials by size, density and other properties — for instance, using magnetism for steel materials.

"With that volume of material, sorting all the different types of plastics, metals, glass and paper would be impossible just using only manual sorting," he said.

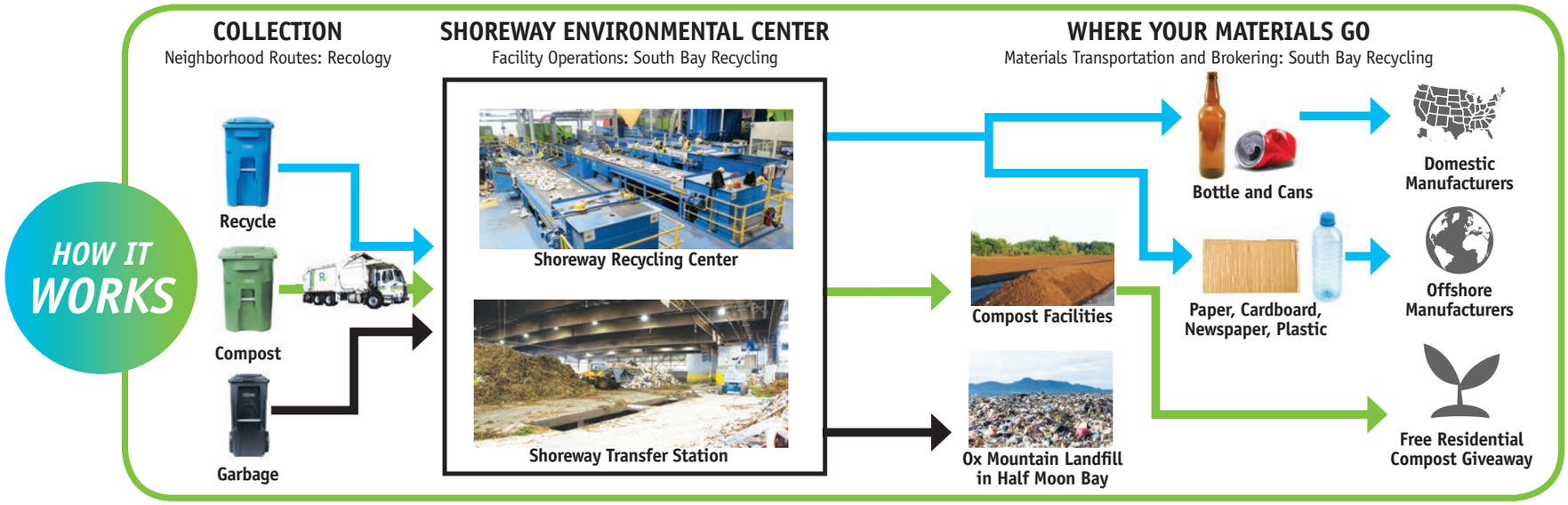
While RethinkWaste *manages* the Shoreway Environmental Center together with its partner South Bay Recycling, it is *owned* by ratepayers. And ratepayers can also keep the facilities running smoothly. That's why it's important for residents and businesses to use their carts correctly.

"We want people to participate by putting their recyclables in their blue cart," Gans said. "We need to make sure residents are following the program guidelines."

> *"We want people to participate [so] we need to make sure residents are following the program guidelines."*
> **Hilary Gans**
> *Senior Facilities and Contracts Manager, RethinkWaste*

Free Public Facility Tours

Want to see for yourself how the Shoreway Environmental Center works? You can! RethinkWaste offers year-round public tours on the first and third Thursday of the month. Find the details at www.rethinkwaste.org/publictours.



BY ANNE STOKES

The Blue Cart: Recycling Made Easy

Knowing what goes into blue carts makes a world of difference

With all the different types of materials out there, recycling may seem complicated. But for RethinkWaste customers, the CartSMART program makes doing the right thing easier by giving residents a blue cart for recycling, green cart for food and yard waste, and black cart for their garbage.

So what goes into the blue carts? The simple answer: paper and containers.

Any type of paper product — such as office paper, newspapers, magazines, cardboard — can go in the blue cart, so long as it's not wet or soiled with food or other contaminants. As for containers, that includes plastic, glass and metal materials — such as aluminum cans, water and soda bottles, detergent bottles and milk jugs. Again, as long as they are empty and clean, they're good to go in the blue cart.

Once collected, materials from these carts are brought to the Shoreway Environmental Center where their contents are sorted and baled at the materials recycling facility (MRF) — also known as the Shoreway Recycling Center — and then sold to domestic and international manufacturers who repurpose them into new products.

Sounds easy enough, right? Problems arise, however, when recyclable materials are contaminated. Contamination occurs when garbage — including liquid and food — or recyclables that don't belong end up in the blue cart.

Up to 13 percent of materials that arrive at the MRF are nonrecyclable — either because they're hazardous, the wrong material or have been contaminated with liquid or food residue. These items often wind up in blue carts because residents believe that simply placing an item into the blue cart means it will end up recycled. Unfortunately, this is not the case — items "wishfully" placed into blue carts do not get recycled and are considered contamination.

"People are putting materials in that aren't eligible for recycling such as propane canisters, batteries, trash, organics, textiles," said Dwight Herring, General Manager of South Bay Recycling, which partners with RethinkWaste to manage and process materials at the Shoreway Environmental Center.

Due to the sheer amount of material that the facility processes, it's impossible to pick out every inappropriate item and just a small amount of contamination can send bales of otherwise recyclable material to the landfill.

"We can all do our part and think twice about what goes in the recycling cart."
Julia Au
Recycling Outreach Programs Manager, RethinkWaste

Keeping materials out of limited landfill space benefits everyone. Some plastic materials take many years to break down, if they ever do, while others — such as food waste — release greenhouse gasses while rotting away buried in the landfill. Recycling and reusing materials also reduces the need to harvest or mine natural resources — like oil or steel, which may be limited.

"We can all do our part and think twice about what goes in the recycling cart," said Julia Au, Recycling Outreach Programs Manager at RethinkWaste. "If you aren't sure, look it up."

WHAT GOES IN THE BLUE CART

DO:

✔ FLATTENED CARDBOARD

✔ GLASS BOTTLES

✔ WATER BOTTLES

✔ PAPER PRODUCTS

✔ EMPTY ALUMINUM, STEEL AND TIN CANS

✔ EMPTY PLASTIC CONTAINERS

DON'T:

POLYSTYRENE FOAM

BATTERIES

BLACK AND FILM PLASTICS

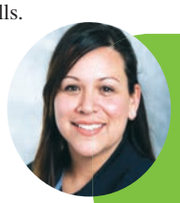
Want to know if something can go in the blue cart? Visit www.rethinkwaste.org or call the San Mateo County Office of Sustainability's hotline at 888-442-2666.

BY RODNEY OROSCO

The Green Cart: Turning Food Scraps Into Rich Soil

Residents are putting tons of food waste back into their gardens

It seems harmless enough to throw that stale breadstick, apple core or greasy pizza box into the garbage, but those items add up. In fact, the *Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 21.6 percent of what goes into landfills is food waste* — making that type of waste currently the largest single waste component in landfills. Simply by using green carts correctly, residents of San Mateo County can save these reusable scraps from a wasted fate.



"For the environment, composting means a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions."
Yvette Madera
Waste Zero Specialist Lead, Recology San Mateo County

"Approximately 11,000 tons of organic material is collected each month and sent to the composting facility for processing, or over 120,000 tons per year," said Yvette Madera, Waste Zero Specialist Lead at Recology San Mateo County.

That remarkable number signifies the impact of RethinkWaste's CartSMART program — where residents are given blue, green and black carts to sort waste materials into — and the commitment that 12 public agencies within San Mateo County have made to re-imagine what "garbage" really means.

The green cart is where residents should put their food scraps, yard trimmings and food-soiled paper products.

"The material in the green cart is taken to a composting facility where it is screened, turned, watered and processed into a nutrient-rich soil amendment," Madera explained.

The compost is then available back to residents for *free* at the Shoreway Environmental Center.

"Residents can bring their own bucket, or use the bags that are available onsite," Madera said.

This "black gold" is excellent not only as a soil amendment for backyard gardens but also as a means to save the planet.

"For the environment, composting means a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions," Madera said.

If food waste is put into the black cart and sent to the landfill, it produces greenhouse gases that would otherwise not be released into the atmosphere by proper disposal and composting. Food waste buried in the landfill decomposes without oxygen — which is necessary for decomposition — and produces methane, a greenhouse gas.

So, how do residents feel about taking the extra step and dumping that moldy avocado into their green cart for collection instead of into the garbage? Madera said most residents are easily filling up their green carts every week.

"Approximately 80 percent of residents set the green carts out for service on a weekly basis," she said.

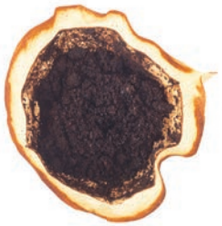
WHAT GOES IN THE GREEN CART

DO:

✔ FOOD SCRAPS

✔ TEA BAGS

✔ FOOD-SOILED PAPER PRODUCTS



✔ COFFEE GROUNDS

✔ GREASY PIZZA BOXES

✔ LEAVES

DON'T:

✘ ANIMAL WASTE

✘ COOKING OIL

✘ GARBAGE

Need to know if something goes in the green cart? Visit www.rethinkwaste.org or call the San Mateo County Office of Sustainability hotline at 888-442-2666.

BY RODNEY OROSCO

The Black Cart: Use It for What's Left

Items in the black cart are destined for the landfill

In RethinkWaste's weekly collection program, CartSMART, black carts are the carts of last resort.

The blue cart is for paper, plastic and metal recycling. The green cart is for food and yard waste. And for everything else?

"The black cart is for materials that cannot be recycled, composted or repurposed," said Mia Rossi, Waste Zero Manager at Recology San Mateo County.

Simply put, everything in the black cart is going to the landfill. Another way to think of it is that what goes in the black cart will likely be around for several generations and emit greenhouse gases the whole time.

Making sure the right waste goes into each of the three colored carts gives residents three chances to make a difference and help the environment. Which means if residents are being cart savvy, the black cart should be close to empty.

"It is important for residents to use the black cart correctly," Rossi said. "We want to capture all recyclable and compostable materials so they can be repurposed for better use."

Keeping garbage out of the landfill makes economic sense alongside these environmental benefits.

"If the local landfill can no longer be utilized, garbage will have to be transferred to a landfill outside of our county," Rossi said. Translation: Getting rid of garbage will cost residents more money.

And the cost does not end there. Shipping garbage out of the county will "increase the carbon footprint associated with the transportation of the materials," Rossi said, which impacts the environment.

Luckily, all residents have to do is think before they toss.

By familiarizing themselves with what items can go in each cart, residents can pick the right color cart for their items.

To reduce any guesswork on the behalf of residents, each cart also has a list of what should go inside of it on the its lid (for instance, a diaper is definitely a black cart item). For any lingering questions on where an unwanted item should go, residents can contact RethinkWaste by visiting www.rethinkwaste.org.

"First and foremost, we should all be diligent in practicing the 3Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle."
Mia Rossi
Waste Zero Manager, Recology San Mateo County

"First and foremost, we should all be diligent in practicing the 3Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle," Rossi said.

So if residents are cart smart, the most activity will be in the blue and green carts while the black cart will echo with crickets.

WHAT GOES IN THE BLACK CART

DO:

PACKING PEANUTS

POTATO CHIP BAG

BROKEN TOYS

DIAPERS

PLASTIC BAGS

FOIL-LINED CONTAINERS

DON'T:

BATTERIES

MOTOR OIL

ELECTRONIC WASTE

These items are all considered "household hazardous waste" and should be taken to Shoreway Environmental Center for free disposal.

Need to know if something belongs in the black cart? Visit www.rethinkwaste.org or call the San Mateo County Office of Sustainability hotline at 888-442-2666.

BY ANNE STOKES

On the Front Line of Sorting Recyclables

Every day on the job for Dwight Herring and his South Bay Recycling team can be a dangerous one, but it doesn't have to be if residents dispose of hazardous items correctly!
PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER, JR.

Help protect our workers

For Dwight Herring, the day he witnessed an explosion started out just like any other day at work. As General Manager for South Bay Recycling, Herring's job involves running the Shoreway Environmental Center, where 300 tons of recyclable materials are sorted and processed onsite *every day* at the Shoreway Recycling Center — its materials recovery facility (MRF). All it took was one propane canister to put his life, and the lives of many other sanitation workers, at risk.

"We've had propane canisters get all the way through our system into the baler," he said. "I happened to be out in the MRF one day when that happened, and it blew up. Had I been five feet back, I would have been a victim. We've had several incidents like that."

Thankfully, no one was harmed in this incident, but that's not always the case. In 2016, a fire that was most likely started by a lithium-ion battery closed the facility while nearly $8.5 million in repairs were made. Unfortunately, explosions and fires are a common occurrence at recycling centers.

Hazardous materials wrongly placed in blue carts — like batteries, propane canisters, medical sharps and toxic chemicals — may be out of sight and mind for the public. But at the facility, these materials can easily come into contact with human hands and pose a real risk to employee safety — they can also damage expensive facility equipment.

"Our employees come to work like anybody else who goes to work. You go to work to provide for your family, you don't go to work to get injured," Herring said. "Hazardous waste needs to be disposed of properly. Electronic waste of any kind — computers, laptops, cell phones, power tools — that have batteries in them, any type of electronic waste should never go into the blue cart. Those are the big ones that definitely pose a hazard to our employees."

Herring said while many fires at the facility are caused by incendiary items, he doesn't believe residents incorrectly recycle dangerous items maliciously.

"I think residents look at a propane canister and think, 'Well it's metal, you can recycle it,'" he said, adding "If we're having to pull out hazardous materials, it definitely has an effect on our productivity."

In some instances, the facility has to be shut down to allow workers to manually recover items and repair equipment. But that's only if materials are caught in time.

Herring noted that all these serious risks — exploding materials, facility fires and millions of dollars in damages — are 100 percent preventable. San Mateo County residents simply need to recycle correctly the first time, and keep their batteries — and other prohibited materials — out of the recycling cart.

> *"Our employees come to work like anybody else who goes to work. You go to work to provide for your family, you don't go to work to get injured."*
> **Dwight Herring**
> *General Manager, South Bay Recycling*

WHAT TO DO WITH HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Dangerous items don't belong with recyclables or in landfills. To keep workers safe and the environment clean, it's important to dispose of such materials responsibly.

Don't put these household hazardous waste (HHW) items into your blue, green or black cart — know where to drop them off for free!

Shoreway Public Recycling Center accepts:

- Electronics
- Latex and oil-based paints
- Household batteries
- Used motor oil and filters
- Medical sharps in appropriate sealed containers
- Fluorescent lights
- Small appliances

Drop-offs are free to residents, and the facility is open Monday through Saturday 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. at 333 Shoreway Road in San Carlos.

San Mateo County's HHW Program accepts:

- Household cleaners
- Garden fertilizers and pesticides
- Aerosol cans
- Automotive supplies such as car batteries, used motor oil, antifreeze and gasoline
- Batteries
- Fluorescent lights (limit 10 per appointment)
- Paint
- Pool and spa chemicals
- Propane tanks (5-gallon size maximum)

Drop-offs are free to all county residents by appointment only. Call 650-363-4718 to make an appointment at an available collection center.

Questions? Visit www.recyclestuff.org or www.smchealth.org/hhw.

BY RODNEY OROSCO

Where Does It Go? A Guide

A IS FOR ANIMAL WASTE

Animal waste can contaminate local waterways with disease and harmful bacteria. Always remember to pick up after your pet and place the bagged waste in the black garbage cart.

B IS FOR BATTERIES

Batteries cannot be thrown into the garbage, they're dangerous! Take them to a designated drop-off location, such as Shoreway Public Recycling Center. Find other locations at www.recyclestuff.org.

C IS FOR CARPET

Having carpet installed? Under California law (AB 2398), carpet producers are responsible for recycling your old carpet and padding. Replacing carpet yourself? Visit www.recyclestuff.org to find a take-back location and keep carpet out of the landfill.

D IS FOR DRUGS

San Mateo County passed an ordinance in 2015 requiring medicine manufacturers to create free and convenient drop-off locations for unwanted medicines. Typically, these locations are at pharmacies and local police stations. Find the closest disposal kiosk at www.recyclestuff.org.

E IS FOR ELECTRONIC WASTE

Electronic waste includes televisions, computers, small appliances — anything with a circuit board or plug — and does not belong in any of the three carts. Take these items to the Shoreway Public Recycling Center to be properly recycled.

F IS FOR FOOD SCRAPS

Wasted food is the single biggest occupant in landfills, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). So make sure to put your food scraps into the green compost cart!

G IS FOR GLASS

Whole and broken glass bottles and jars can be recycled in the blue recycling cart. Broken mirrors and other types of glass belong in the black garbage cart.

H IS FOR HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE (HHW)

Paint, household cleaners, pesticides and other toxic chemicals and items should not be thrown in any cart. Dispose of these items through San Mateo County's HHW Program by making an appointment at www.smchealth.org/hhw, or calling 650-363-4718.

I IS FOR INCANDESCENT LIGHTS

Incandescent light bulbs are safe to put into the black cart because they do not contain hazardous mercury, a component of fluorescent lights.

J IS FOR JUICE BOXES

A common misconception is that juice boxes and similar containers, such as soup and milk boxes, are recyclable. Because these items contain multiple kinds of materials, like plastic, paper and aluminum, they belong in the black garbage cart.

K IS FOR KITCHEN ITEMS

Metal utensils, pots and pans should be put into the blue recycling cart!

L IS FOR LIGHTS — FLUORESCENT

Fluorescent lights should be taken back to your local hardware store. Find the closest location that collects them by checking out www.recyclestuff.org. Fluorescent lights can also be dropped off at the Shoreway Public Recycling Center.

M IS FOR MATTRESSES

Recycle unwanted mattresses by requesting a free bulky item pickup from Recology San Mateo County. You can also drop off your mattress at the Shoreway Transfer Station for free.

N IS FOR NEEDLES

Putting needles and medical sharps in the garbage or recycling can be a major hazard to recycling/garbage handlers! Dispose of them at a designated sharps disposal location. Check out www.recyclestuff.org for locations near you.

From A to Z

O IS FOR OIL (COOKING)

Don't throw your cooking oil down the drain! Instead, collect it in a container and drop it off at Shoreway Public Recycling Center.

P IS FOR PROPANE TANKS

Propane tanks can be dangerous. Properly dispose of them through San Mateo County's HHW Program, either at their permanent facility or during a temporary event. Make an appointment at www.smchealth.org/hhw or by calling 650-363-4718.

Q IS FOR QUILTS AND OTHER TEXTILES (INCLUDING SHOES)

The EPA estimates that approximately 10.4 million tons of textiles are sent to the landfill every year. Donate unwanted clothing that is wearable to your local thrift store.

R IS FOR RAZORS

Most conventional razors are made of plastic that is not recyclable and should be placed in the garbage

S IS FOR "STYROFOAM" (AKA FOAMED POLYSTYRENE)

Foamed polystyrene is a plastic that has air blown into it and most recycling facilities cannot recycle it, including RethinkWaste. If you have it at home, please put it in the garbage and try to avoid buying it in the future.

T IS FOR TIRES

Tires can be dropped off at the Shoreway Transfer Station for a fee, so they can be recycled and reused in asphalt or pavement.

U IS FOR USED MOTOR OIL AND FILTERS

Used motor oil and oil filters can be recycled! RethinkWaste customers in single-family homes can put used oil and oil filters next to their carts on collection day, or take them to select auto retailers and auto shops. The used oil can be re-refined, and oil filters can be properly recycled.

V IS FOR VIDEO CASSETTES, DVDS, CDS

These items can be shredded and the plastic recycled for use in special boutique items like bags or decorative items. Check www.recyclestuff.org for drop-off locations near you.

W IS FOR WOOD (TREATED AND UNTREATED)

Wood that is untreated and clean can be taken to Shoreway Transfer Station for a fee. Visit www.recyclestuff.org to find out where to take your treated or stained wood for proper disposal.

X IS FOR X-MAS TREES

Christmas trees are collected from December 26 through January 31 on regular collection days by Recology San Mateo County. Please remove all decorations and tree stands first. If you live in an apartment, call to arrange collection of holiday trees.

Y IS FOR YARD WASTE

Grass clippings, wood chips and all plants should all be placed in your green compost cart.

Z IS FOR ZIP-TOP BAGS AND PLASTIC FILM

Zip-top plastic bags and other film plastics do NOT go in the blue recycling cart. You can bring them for proper disposal at the Shoreway Public Recycling Center.

WHERE TO GO

Recology San Mateo County
225 Shoreway Road, San Carlos
650-595-3900
carts@recology.com
www.recology.com
(Bills or scheduling services)

South Bay Recycling
333 Shoreway Road, San Carlos
650-802-8355
www.sbrecycling.net
(Waste rates and materials accepted at Shoreway Environmental Center)

San Mateo County Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Program
650-363-4718
HHW@smcgov.org
www.smchealth.org/hhw
(HHW disposal and appointments at collection centers for HHW drop-off)

Shoreway Environmental Center hours are:
Shoreway Public Recycling Center: Monday-Saturday, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.
Shoreway Transfer Station: Monday-Friday, 6 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturday & Sunday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

How to Reduce Your Waste — It's Easy!

Gordon Tong is a Sustainability Program Manager for San Mateo County's Office of Sustainability.
PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR.

A Q&A with a San Mateo County waste reduction expert

Gordon Tong wants the citizens of San Mateo County to save the world one pizza box and soda can at a time. "Recycling and waste reduction are some of the easiest things people can do to help the environment," said Tong, Sustainability Program Manager for San Mateo County's Office of Sustainability. "By doing these simple things, you are thinking globally but acting locally."

Putting a used paper plate in the green cart or an empty can in the blue cart may seem like an insignificant act in the big scheme of things. However, Tong sees it quite differently: "Compared to some of the other ways to mitigate climate change, waste reduction is one of the easiest and most tangible ways."

For the past two years, Tong has been doing his part to help residents live up to their recycling potential. Thanks to the county's assistance, recycling right is easier for residents than ever!

Q: What special waste reduction programs are offered in San Mateo County?

GT: The county's Office of Sustainability (OOS) operates a plethora of waste reduction programs available to all county residents and businesses:

- **Compost workshops:** Learn how to compost food scraps and yard material at home. Free compost bins for all attendees!
- **Discounted compost and worm bins:** Purchase low-cost compost bins and accessories, or get rebates for building your own compost bin.
- **Rebates:** Residents can get up to $100 for building their own compost bin.
- **Schools program:** The OOS coordinates with RethinkWaste to provide field trips and classroom presentations to schools throughout the county on the 4Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle, rot/compost).
- **Fixit Clinic:** Learn how to fix your broken items with the assistance of Fixit Coaches.

For information on how to sign up for these programs, visit www.smcsustainability.org/waste.

Q: What should businesses know about recycling?

GT: Beginning in 2019, all businesses that generate over 4 cubic yards of garbage per week are required to compost their organics. The county also runs a Green Business program that recognizes and certifies businesses that commit to certain sustainability practices.

Q: What should residents do if someone is illegally dumping?

GT: Report it to their local government. Each city deals with illegal dumping a little differently, but most have a way that allows residents to anonymously report illegal dumping, whether it be through a hotline, website or a mobile app.

Q: What should residents do with unwanted electronics?

GT: If the electronics are broken, residents should consider bringing them to a Fixit Clinic to determine if they can be repaired. Residents can also drop them off to be recycled at places such as the Shoreway Environmental Center. For a detailed list of all drop-off locations, please visit www.recyclestuff.org. Each city in the county may also have their own regularly scheduled e-waste collection events where residents can drop off their electronics for recycling.

START BY REDUCING

The only thing better than recycling correctly is reducing the amount of waste you generate in the first place.

1. **Use reusable containers** whenever possible. This includes reusable to-go mugs and using reusable bags when shopping.

2. **Fix broken items rather** than disposing of them immediately. Attend a Fixit Clinic where you can learn how to take apart broken items and repair them alongside Fixit Coaches.

3. **Opt for digital** documents instead of paper. If you must use paper, use both sides.

4. **Reduce food waste!** Learn tips on how to save food by visiting www.lovefoodnotwaste.org.

5. **Avoid single-use items** like straws, plastic cups, plastic bags, etc.

BY ANNE STOKES

Recycle It Right

New international recycling standards shake up markets

For years, U.S. municipalities were able to sell their recyclables to China, the biggest international buyer, as long as their contamination rates — or how much bales of recyclables included nonrecyclable materials — were 5 percent or less. However, in 2017, China enacted its "National Sword" policy, limiting the acceptable amount of recyclables contaminated with unwanted materials to half a percent — a precipitous change. This change shook up the international commodities market, creating a surplus of recyclables and causing the price to plummet — creating a big problem for the U.S.

"China's feeling was 'We've become the landfill for the world and we don't like that.' That's an understandable position," said Joe La Mariana, Executive Director of RethinkWaste. "What shocked the recycling system was that it happened with so little notice."

Normally, municipalities would have three to five years to implement new equipment, systems, technologies and processes to account for the change. China's new policy gave municipalities like RethinkWaste only five months to plan.

"We had from the end of October 2017 to the beginning of March 2018," said La Mariana, "and we simply couldn't change our $35 million recycling facility equipment and operations that quickly."

So what does that mean for materials recovery facilities (MRFs), like RethinkWaste's Shoreway Recycling Center at the Shoreway Environmental Center? It means finding alternative markets for recyclables, as well as implementing new short- and long-term solutions for better sorted and cleaned materials.

"Our board is very steadfast in meeting the environmental requirements and mandates issued by the state to find alternative uses for the material and not to landfill it," La Mariana said. "We're adding more labor and, in the longterm, we've got a number of different options that we're going to phase in depending on where the market settles."

Because demand for and prices of recyclable materials have dropped to virtually nothing in the wake of the new international policy, La Mariana also said that program costs to ratepayers will increase. In the past, some recyclable materials would sell for up to $150 a ton which helped offset some of the costs of recycling programs. Today, because the U.S.'s contamination rates are so high, facilities are finding themselves without buyers and incurring transportation and storage costs for unsold materials.

"Previous revenue streams offset a significant portion — but not all — of the recycling program costs. That is no longer and is creating a pretty big hole in our budget," he said. "It will affect the ratepayers as it trickles down. There will be some added cost."

While the problem is a global one, there is something ratepayers in San Mateo County can do to help.

"The cleaner the material is coming into the plant, the easier and better chance of success we have in producing an even higher quality of material coming out of the plant," La Mariana said.

> *"The cleaner the material is coming into the plant, the easier and better chance of success we have in producing an even higher quality of material."*
> **Joe La Mariana**
> *Executive Director, RethinkWaste*

WHAT IS CONTAMINATION?

Contamination is a serious problem in today's recycling streams. It occurs when undesirable items find their way into the blue or green cart, and prevents manufacturers from buying loads of recyclables that are contaminated with too much unusable material. Whether it's plastics mixed with food residue, or hazardous items like batteries that risk workers' safety, contaminated loads of recyclables don't get recycled — they end up in a landfill.

The good news is contamination is preventable. Here are some easy tips to make sure you are recycling correctly the first time:

- ✔ **DO make sure** plastic, glass and metal containers are empty (you **don't** need to wash them thoroughly).
- ✔ **DO separate** containers and paper from organic waste and garbage.
- ✔ **DO research** if you're unsure if something is recyclable.

- ✘ **DO NOT** assume everything can be recycled.
- ✘ **DO NOT** throw household hazardous waste, like batteries and electronics, into any of the three carts.
- ✘ **DO NOT** assume machines and sorters are able to catch every material that doesn't belong. Garbage is not sorted at the Shoreway Environmental Center.

For large items, household hazardous waste and other questionable materials, contact San Mateo County's Office of Sustainability hotline at 888-442-2666.

Recycling Right Together

HOW TO RECYCLE RIGHT

Recycling is easy for RethinkWaste residents, just follow the colors! But, make sure that an item actually belongs in a cart *before* you put it there:

Blue = paper and containers

Green = food and yard waste

Black = garbage

Visit www.rethinkwaste.org

To start your recycling adventure

- Take an interactive cart challenge (where does that pizza box go?)
- Come see where your recycling, compost and garbage goes by visiting us on a public tour of the Shoreway Environmental Center
- Third through 5th graders can participate in our annual art contests!

... and more!

HAVE A QUESTION? CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ...

COLLECTION SERVICE PROVIDER:
Recology San Mateo County
225 Shoreway Road,
San Carlos
650-595-3900
carts@recology.com
www.recology.com

RETHINKWASTE-OWNED RECYCLING FACILITY AND TRANSFER STATION:
Shoreway Environmental Center
South Bay Recycling
333 Shoreway Road, San Carlos
650-802-8355
www.sbrecycling.net

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE EXPERTS:
San Mateo County Household Hazardous Waste Program
650-363-4718
www.smchealth.org/hhw

Rethink waste
South Bayside Waste Management Authority

A Public Agency

www.rethinkwaste.org

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