

INFORMATION ON CONTAINERS AND BAGS



Background

People's confusion about separate collection results in mistakes, apathy and scepticism, and it is causing people to throw tons of waste and wrong materials in the recycling bins every day. This confusion can be due, among other reasons, to unclear labels on recycling containers and bins. Presence of wrong materials in recycling bins has serious consequences on the economic result of recycling.

If information given to citizens is adequate and well communicated, the result will be higher commitment in contributing to reach recycling targets and objectives. Citizens should be provided regular and consistent information via different channels, including at the point of ultimate separation – i.e. on the collection containers and bags themselves. The information aims to clarify doubts of citizens, increase their understanding of recycling processes and could include recycling targets as an additional motivation.

ACTION



Include illustrative and a brief information about paper collection with the recycling instructions both on containers and bags

Examples of best practice implemented

Medway Council (United Kingdom) – Bags for recycling (REF: 1)



Figure-1. Informative Paper and board bags collection in Medway council (UK). Source: Recycle (UK)

At Medway Council in UK, citizens can collect separately paper and board using blue reusable bag. This bag is properly illustrated to allow the collection of newspapers/magazines, telephone directories, envelopes, junk mail, paper, flattened cardboard, cereal and egg boxes.

University of Illinois (Chicago, USA) - Labels for paper bins (REF: 2)



Figure-2. Labels used for Paper and board collection in Uni of Illinois (Chicago, USA). Source: Uni of Illinois

The Sustainability Office of the University of Illinois has developed informative labels for all the campus and university containers, which allows staff, teachers and students to know how to recycle mixed paper.

These labels show which items can be collected and which cannot at the paper bin.

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Keep in mind that...

- ⚠ **Information on bags and containers does not need to include text, clear images and illustrations can be sufficient for proper understanding. It is advisable to use very graphic material so that people can understand the message directly.**
- ⚠ **The installation of a QR code on the label/container may also be appropriate. In this way, citizens will have online information. However, this additional element would never replace a proper information on the bin.**
- ⚠ **In case that the informative collection bag is not made by paper or board, don't deposit into the container of paper for recycling.**

How to start? (REF: 4)

- ✓ **Use images (not just text):** The addition of images to the graphics more than doubled the recycling rate. People can understand the message faster and it's more effective.
- ✓ **Keep consistent color-coding:** Use the same colors associated to the waste stream to help reinforce the connection and help people make the right choice.
- ✓ **Keep it simple:** People only have about 2 seconds to make a decision as they approach a recycling container. If they are overloaded with images/text it becomes overwhelming.
- ✓ **Clearly visible:** Make sure you place recycling graphics where people can see them. Most popular choices are on the front of the container, on a backboard or next to the openings.
- ✓ **Consistency is key:** It's vital to ensure that all recycling labels throughout your municipality are consistent in terms of image, color and text.
- ✓ **Overcoming language barriers:** If your municipality includes a high percentage of people who speak a different language, take this into account when designing your recycling graphics to help them participate.

- ✓ **Update your recycling graphics if changes are made:** Just remember to update your graphics whenever you make a change to help people adapt to the new behavior. Also change your labels when they get deteriorated.



Potential benefits

			
Increment of citizens knowledge and engagement		●	●
Redution of impurities by an improved segregation of materials	●	●	
Low investment needed	●		



References:

1. MEDWAY COUNCIL, UK (2017) – Recycling bags.
2. UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, USA (2017) – Labels for paper bins.
3. PETER KELLEY, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON (2016) – Cash in the trash: interactive composting, recycling station shows savings in real time.
4. CLEAN RIVER (2017) – 8 Tips for effective recycling posters.