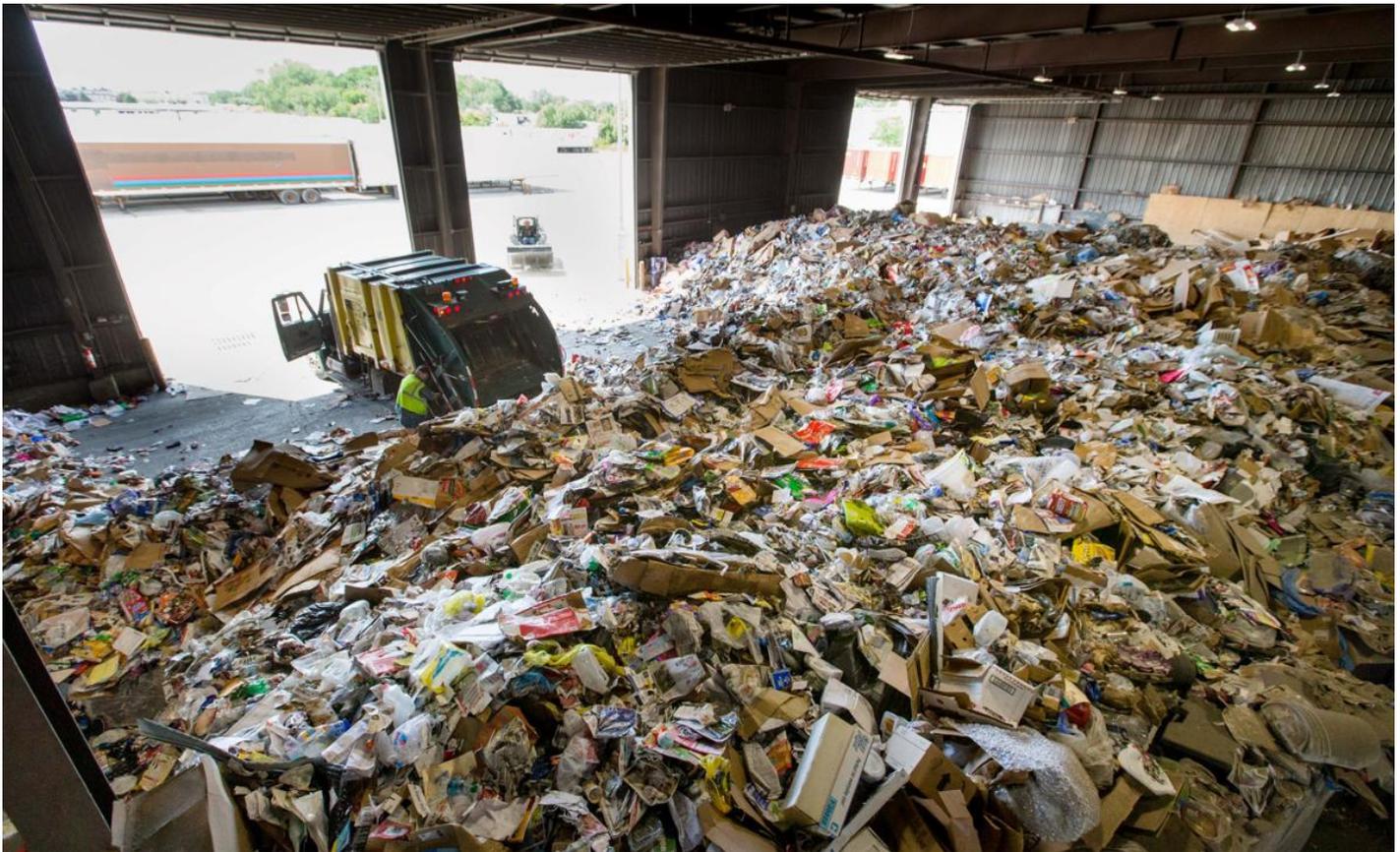


[http://www.omaha.com/news/plus/first-star-to-stop-accepting-commingled-recycling-from-businesses/article\\_e5da941e-c222-54a7-be1d-9c8a699b38c8.html](http://www.omaha.com/news/plus/first-star-to-stop-accepting-commingled-recycling-from-businesses/article_e5da941e-c222-54a7-be1d-9c8a699b38c8.html)

## First Star to stop accepting commingled recycling from businesses

By Emily Nohr / World-Herald staff writer 1 hr ago



A truck delivers a load in the receiving area at First Star Recycling, 10330 I St., on June 17, 2015.

KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD

[Buy Now](#)

You might see two recycling bins the next time you toss a pop can at the office or your favorite Omaha sandwich shop.

That's because of a significant change at First Star Recycling, the area's largest recycler.

Starting last week, First Star stopped accepting "commingled" recyclables from commercial sources in Omaha.

That means that the task of sorting recyclables thrown away at offices and businesses will have to take place before they get to First Star. The change will involve collecting paper and cardboard products separately from containers made of plastic and metal.

The changes won't affect the city's curbside recycling program; residents can still mix together clean paper, empty milk cartons and other recyclables in their green bin at the curb.

At least one group is concerned about First Star's new policy because they say the change came quickly, leaving businesses little time to adapt.

Several businesses and haulers contacted by The World-Herald last week said they're still figuring out what the change means for them. A spokeswoman for the Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium said it's still "in the process of developing solutions."

Dale Gubbels, First Star's president and CEO, said the switch to dual-stream recycling is necessary for his business, which sorts, bales and sells material to be repurposed. And, he said, the changes aren't unique.

Many recycling operations across the country are reeling after China last year stopped accepting a host of recyclable material and got stricter about accepting contaminated material.

Most people probably don't think about the journey their recyclables take. And the changes in China, and their impact on American markets, has put a spotlight on Americans' recycling habits.

While people may feel good about recycling when they throw paper and other material into a recycling bin, a greasy pizza box or half-full can of pop can contaminate perfectly good recyclables, rendering them no longer valuable and likely bound for the landfill.

"Unless it's treated as a commodity," Gubbels said of recyclables, "it's unrecoverable."

Gubbels said material is less likely to get contaminated if it's collected separately, leading to more valuable material and less time and effort spent sorting at his facility. He noted that many people aren't trying to be disrespectful, but they "wishful recycle," meaning they throw something away,

hoping a facility like First Star can process it.

Gubbels said some loads of mixed commercial waste -- all recyclables dumped into the same bin at an office or business -- are as much as 40 percent contaminated.

"It's really painful to see that go out" to the landfill, he said. But "there's no value."

Craig Moody, managing principal at Verdis Group, an environmental consulting firm, said a cost could be passed on to area businesses that choose to add another bin. That involves not just another bin, but signage, training and public education. It also requires more space for bins and dumpsters.

"We understand why First Star is in the position they're in," he said. "It's a tough market. But we run into people every day that just have no idea this is coming."

The University of Nebraska at Omaha currently has a single-stream program, which allows recyclable paper, plastic and metal to go into one bin. But it's in the process of receiving bids for a new waste hauling contract. Sam Petto, a university spokesman, said UNO's final decision to switch to a dual-stream system will be tied with its next waste hauler.

"If our hauler decides to take our recyclables to a facility that still accepts commercial single-stream, we will not have to change; however, our Facilities and Sustainability staff say this option is unlikely," he said.

Lisa Disbrow, a spokeswoman for Waste Management, a hauler in Omaha, said it's evaluating its recycling processing options locally and out-of-state. She said about 20 percent to 25 percent of its commercial customers have a recycling option.

Disbrow said single-stream recycling has several benefits, including that it requires fewer trucks to operate and reduces fuel consumption, "providing substantial greenhouse gas and environmental benefits for communities."

Brent Crampton, director of partnerships for Hillside Solutions, a subsidiary of Gretna Sanitation, said First Star's change could push people to become more aware of things that are and aren't recyclable.

Michael O'Hara, chairman of the recycling committee for the Sierra Club's Missouri Valley group, said he wants First Star to be financially viable. "Without it, we're not going to have as much recycling as we would have otherwise," he said.

Gubbels said First Star has been notifying haulers and will work with businesses to help them find options. For example, he said, businesses could consider working with RecyclePal, a valet recycling service that will sort and inspect material before taking it to First Star.

#### MORE INFORMATION



Dos and don'ts of recycling

## Emily Nohr

Reporter - Omaha City Hall

Emily covers Omaha city hall for The World-Herald. Previously, Emily covered business, local government and the Nebraska Legislature for The World-Herald. Follow her on Twitter @emnohr. Phone: 402-444-1309.

