

City Of Greensboro Says Goodbye (For Now) To Glass Recycling

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Sorters make sure the right items get separated out at the Winston-Salem material recovery facility. Image courtesy Waste Management.

The city of Greensboro will no longer accept glass at its recycling facilities. The move comes as the demand for glass bottles has declined, and the cost to recycle them has skyrocketed.

Currently, glass makes up a quarter of all recyclable materials that Greensboro residents put in their curbside recycle bins. But, once there, it's a hassle for companies to deal with. Separating glass from the plastic and paper requires

intensive labor. It's abusive to machines, erodes containers, and its excessive weight makes it tough to haul.

Until now, the city's recycling company Republic Services had been paying Greensboro \$15 dollars a ton for its recycling, generating \$375,000 annually for city coffers. But Waste Reduction Supervisor Tori Carle says that with handling costs soaring, and China halting virtually all recycled paper and plastic imports last year, huge supply and very little demand have led to tough choices.

"We're going to start out at \$30, move to \$60 next fiscal year, and then \$90 for the remainder of the contract," says Carle. "And that might seem like a big shock like, 'Oh, my gosh! Greensboro is going to be paying \$11 million dollars over the life of this contract. That's so much.' But there are many other communities having to rip the Band-Aid off and they're going right out the door having to pay \$125 dollars a ton."

On Tuesday night, the Greensboro City Council voted to take glass off the list of recyclable materials. Also included in the list of banned items is cartons (milk, soup, juice, etc.), large plastic items (lawn furniture, buckets, etc.), metal pots and pans, aerosol cans and shredded paper.

As a cost saving measure, glass will instead be disposed of in landfills beginning July 1st.

"If I had to choose between paper, plastic, metal or glass I would choose glass," says Carle. "Glass doesn't leach chemicals into landfills and it actually helps compact trash with its weight, eventually turning into sand over the decades."

Carle says residents will still be able to continue recycling their glass at one or two potential drop off locations. She adds that ABC recycling will continue as well. Any bar or restaurant having an ABC license is required to establish separate glass recycling from their other recyclables.