

Text of ecomaine letter:

From: **Denise Mungen** <mungen@ecomaine.org>

Date: Wed, May 2, 2018 at 12:44 PM

Subject: ecomaine needs your help with the all-time low recyclables market

Dear **ecomaine** member communities:

I am writing to update you on the current state of the markets for post-consumer mixed paper, which accounts for nearly 60% of the recyclable material that passes through our facility on a daily basis. While markets for other types of recyclables such as plastic have also experienced recent volatility, residential mixed paper has experienced the greatest downturn in market value, hitting historic lows. To add perspective, residential paper has fallen from a positive \$100 per ton a little over a year ago down to a negative \$30 - \$60 per ton today. Yes, we're *paying* \$60 per ton to market our paper, which amounts to a \$160 per ton swing in paper prices over the last year.

Three primary variables are contributing to this:

1. A huge glut of residential mixed paper, which has put supply and demand severely out of balance. In particular, China recently banned the importation of many grades of paper and plastic which has had a negative impact on markets.
2. Contamination levels are high and China (the largest importer) has set new contamination policies that are very strict. Other markets have followed this trend and enforcement of these new requirements are at an all-time high.
3. Compounding the problem is the disappearance of newspapers, which used to be the predominant recyclable material in the bin. With little to no newspapers, markets have dried up.

With buyers not paying anything (and, in fact, charging us to take the paper), they're also much less tolerant of any contamination. China's new requirements allow only a 0.5% contamination level, which is below industry specifications. Many buyers are now inspecting every load for contaminants and rejecting those loads that do not meet their requirements.

To meet these new market demands, ecomaine is taking bold operational steps to attempt to remove contamination, including:

- the quadrupling of staff on our paper-sorting lines,
- slowing down the lines, and
- researching new sorting screen technology.

With this extra cost, we are also more closely monitoring and inspecting recyclable loads that are delivered to the recycling facility, and charging fees for the contamination per our ongoing policies.

Specific fees are as follows:

- any load with greater than 5% contamination will be charged an extra \$40 per ton;
- any load with 10% or greater contamination will be charged an extra \$70.50 per ton
- revenue and cost-sharing customers will be paying over \$100 per ton in the current market environment.

This is the first time in 30 years we've seen markets for recyclables exceed trash disposal costs and we recognize this is a significant financial burden. However, we have no control over the markets for recyclable materials. Historically, markets have traditionally experienced a cyclical pattern, but this glut has continued for an extended period. Time will tell if and when we see market relief. We need everyone, including public works staff, transfer station operators, haulers and the public at large, to be more diligent about putting the *correct* items in their recycling bins. **Any contamination is problematic and makes the current market situation even more challenging.**

We are all in this fight against contamination together; **here are some specific ways you can immediately leverage ecomaine tools and resources** to help correct bad recycling habits in your community:

1. **Look for and share media coverage.** We are hosting a press conference with local media outlets here at ecomaine Thursday, May 3, at 8:30 a.m. to heighten awareness and urgency to all do our part to take responsibility for recycling contamination. We will send any coverage we earn through email and on social media so you can share the news in your community, too.
2. **Promote use of the [RECYCLOPEDIA](#) app:** we've attached a poster for the RECYCLOPEDIA, a link to the [media kit](#) with instructions on how to put the RECYCLOPEDIA on your website, and double-sided flyer you can print.
3. **Contact our full-time environmental educator** to work with your transfer station staff or schools – come in for tours or invite us to visit you! Email venhuizen@ecomaine.org or call Katrina Venhuizen at 207-523-3141.
4. **Replenish your inventory of [DO/DON'T cards](#) and new [YES/NO posters](#).** Email info@ecomaine.org to request posters or DO/DON'T cards for your transfer station or town offices.
5. **Attend and invite your staff to attend an ecomaine educational session.** We have scheduled two education sessions, on May 24 at noon and June 26 at 8 a.m. Space is limited and more sessions will be planned as demand warrants. Reserve your spot by emailing Denise Mungen at mungen@ecomaine.org.
6. **Save the Date and invite your community to attend the annual ecomaine Recycling Open House on Sept. 29** from 8 a.m. – 11 a.m. (Details included on the flyer referenced in bullet 2.)
7. **Follow us on social media ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#))** and share our posts about common contamination pitfalls and common RECYCLOPEDIA questions.

Thanks for all of your hard work to reduce contamination and keep our recycling programs strong and sustainable. Please forward this information to all community members who can help us get the word out on this important issues. As always, I welcome your questions and feedback on our education and outreach programming and tools.

Kevin Roche
CEO/ General Manager