

The importance of proper recycling vital for natural resources and economy

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One major way individuals look to do their part in making a positive contribution towards the environment and to hold on to our natural resources is to recycle.

We are all used to separate our plastics, bottles and paper items from our garbage, throwing them in our municipal recycling blue bin and putting it out on the curb every other week without a second thought.

But what happens to the items that are not properly recycled? Where do they end up? How does this impact us?

According to the Region of Peel, items that aren't recycled properly are considered garbage and are sent to the landfill.

‘Items such as jugs, jars, yoghurt containers are all recyclable. However, you must ensure that these items are rinsed and clean before putting them in the recycling bin,’ said Erwin Pascual, Manager, Waste Planning at Region of Peel. ‘We cannot separate food from containers at our recycling facility. Full or partially full containers can't be recycled. They are sent to landfill as garbage.’

Some items that fall under the recyclable list include plastic, glass and metal containers, magazines, newspapers and cardboard cartons, along with plastic and glass bottles as well as milk and juice cartons. Juice boxes and plastic cups can be recycled, but straws go into the garbage.

According to Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadians throw away around three million tonnes of plastic waste in which only nine per cent is properly recycled. This means that 29,000 tonnes end up in our landfill and in our natural environment.

Some of the items that impact our natural environment include single use plastics, which Environment Canada is working on banning.

‘These items are harmful to our environment and their value is lost from the economy when they are tossed in the trash. This proposed ban will help drive innovation across the country as new and easier-to-recycle items take their place in the economy,’ said Minister of Environment and Climate Change Johnathon Wilkinson in a statement.

Residents are encouraged to educate and inform themselves on not only proper recycling and what steps to take to ensure items go to their rightful place, but the importance of how it can impact our natural resources, and even the economy.

‘Our earth's natural resources are limited. When we draw raw material from the earth to make new items, we are chipping away at our natural resources, consuming energy and creating greenhouse gases,’ said Pascual. ‘One way to help avoid this is to recycle. Recycling also creates jobs, making it good for the economy.’

Many items are reused into new products. Recycled paper and cardboard items turn into cereal boxes, paper towels, newspapers and paper bags.

Plastic containers get remade into insulation for jackets, plastic lumber and storage containers. Pop cans are even reused for airplane and bike parts or turned into new cans.

‘By properly participating in Peel's recycling program, you can help give discarded items another chance at a new life,’ added Pascual.

Pascual states that while the majority of Peel residents participate in recycling, about a fifth to a quarter of materials that is put in the recycling bin is not recyclable. This is called 'contamination' and is the Region of Peel's biggest concern with our recycling.

Contamination includes porcelain and ceramic products, batteries and disposable masks and gloves. These items make it harder for items to be properly sorted and overall impacts the quality of recyclables.

To be able to reuse many recycled items, they must be clean and acceptable, as many recyclable convertible companies won't accept low quality items.

If we don't recycle right, it ultimately impacts our earth because we use raw materials from our natural environment to make new items and use more energy and increase greenhouse gas emissions all of which affect our community, said Pascual.

To learn more about Region of Peel's recycling program and to learn more about what can and cannot be recycled, visit peelregion.ca/waste.