



Are You a Wishful Recycler?

At a Glance:

Learn about “wishful recycling” and why it’s important for everyone (that’s you, too!) to Recycle Right.

You Will Learn:

- 1) Why recycling the wrong items can do more harm than good.
- 2) How to keep recycling sustainable (we need everyone to Recycle Right).

Instructions:

- 1) Read “Are You A Wishful Recycler? Background” on Page 2.
- 2) Watch the video [Remember! Recycling Has Changed in Lancaster County](#).
- 3) Watch the video [Lancaster Waste-to-Energy Facility](#) to learn what happens to items you put in your trash.
- 4) Take LCSWMA’s [Wishful Recycling Quiz](#).

To Think About:

- 1) What does it mean to be a *wishful recycler*?
- 2) How does *wishful recycling* hurt the recycling process?
- 3) What happens to items that you put in the trash instead of the recycling bin?
- 4) What steps can you take to stop your own wishful recycling?

Feedback:

We would love to hear your feedback! Please help us improve this activity by taking a short, one minute survey ([click here](#)).

Learn More:

Visit [recyclerightlancaster.org](#) to explore about this issue and other recycling right topics. Additionally, check out this great video from Brown County, WI about [Wishful Recycling](#). Finally, further test your recycling knowledge by taking Earth911’s [Wishful Recycling](#) quiz.

Bonus:

Complete all four Recycle Right learning activities to receive a Recycle Right Rock Star certificate. [This is activity #3]

Are You A Wishful Recycler? Background

What is “Wishful Recycling”?

We all know that recycling is one important way to help keep our planet clean and protect natural resources. But did you know, not all recycling behaviors are helpful? For instance, some people mistakenly place an item in the recycling bin rather than the trash can, particularly if they think (or hope) the item can be recycled.

Every day, people put items like plastic bags, coffee cups, greasy pizza boxes, and other incorrect items into recycling bins — wishfully thinking that these items can be recycled. Known as “wishful recycling,” this behavior results in contamination that prevents some of the good reusable material from being successfully processed.

Contaminated recyclables cause many issues when they enter the recycling stream, including slowing down material sorting processes, potentially breaking recycling machinery, and even lowering the quality and market price of recyclable materials. Unfortunately, partly due to wishful recyclers who contaminate the recycling stream, recycling costs in the United States are increasing and recycling rates are decreasing.

Even those who have the best of intentions with recycling can do more harm than good with their wishful recycling habits. **Are you a wishful recycler?**

Follow these steps to keep from being a wishful recycler:

- 1) **Think before you throw.** If you want to avoid being a wishful recycler, take the time to learn what items can and cannot be recycled, then try to change your consumption and disposal habits.
- 2) **When in doubt, throw it out.** Placing an item in the recycle bin that does not belong can be costly, dangerous, and could contaminate or ruin other recyclables.
- 3) **Practice!** Making smart sustainable choices requires effort. But **you can make a positive difference.**

To learn more about the Big 4 and how you can **RECYCLE RIGHT**, visit recyclerightlancaster.org.

Recycle Only the Big 4:

