

Navigating Acceptability of Pizza Boxes

In response to concerns from community recyclers and residents, corrugated pizza box manufacturers, and paper mills did a deep dive to determine if grease and residual cheese are a contaminant in the recycling process. The verdict? As long as they are empty, pizza boxes provide valuable feedstock for new paper-based packaging, and residual grease and cheese in the bottom of the box present no issue to recyclability.

The Recycling Partnership dug a little deeper with communities, Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs), and residents. Now we are sharing our learnings and expanded resources with you so your residents are informed. No matter where you and your MRF land regarding acceptability, this guide and related messaging resources arm you with what you need to align with your MRF to keep good cardboard out of the waste stream and into paper recycling.

► Does your MRF already accept empty pizza boxes?

YES



**GET THE WORD OUT AND
EDUCATE FOR RECYCLING**



Is your program explicit regarding your acceptance of empty pizza boxes? Reduce confusion by including pizza boxes in your imagery and messages. See our updated image collections and new social videos.

Download messaging from
pizzaboxrecycling.com

POSSIBLY



**SHARE THIS RESEARCH
WITH YOUR MRF**



New studies point to recyclability.

- **Study Confirms Recyclability with Regard to Grease and Residual Cheese**
- **Mills Want Empty Pizza Boxes**
- **Most Programs Implicitly Accept Pizza Boxes**
- **Most Residents Expect to Recycle Pizza Boxes**

See info on studies on the next page
and visit pizzaboxrecycling.com

It's a box - empty it and recycle it.

CONDITIONALLY



**SHARE THIS RESEARCH
WITH YOUR MRF**



Does your MRF accept cardboard-only truckloads with pizza boxes?
(ex: from drop-off or commercial)

Download signs and messaging from
pizzaboxrecycling.com

NO



**EDUCATE FOR TRASH
OR COMPOST**



Pizza boxes go either into
compost or waste stream.

Four Studies on Pizza Box Recycling

Pizza boxes are recyclable, but there are local inconsistencies in acceptability. That inconsistency typically is based on a belief that mills don't want the product due to grease. *As always, it is imperative for communities, MRFs, and mills to set acceptability lists together.*

To better understand the pizza box issue, The Recycling Partnership collaborated with stakeholders. Here are the findings:

New study of grease confirms empty pizza boxes are recyclable.

The general conclusion is that “the strength loss of the resulting product made with recovered fiber that incorporates post-consumer pizza boxes should be minimal at typical levels of grease expected to be received in a recycling facility (<2%) and when included in the recovered fiber at expected levels of <3% of furnish.” In other words, residual grease and cheese are not an issue.

See the full study here: <https://www.westrock.com/greasecheesestudy>.

Mills want empty pizza boxes.

According to an American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) survey, “members indicating they accept corrugated pizza boxes for recycling represent 93.6% of the total amount of OCC that our member companies consume.” In our conversations with MRFs, no one reported bales being downgraded or rejected for pizza boxes. This is why consistent communications and tracking of quality and quantity is important.

See full statement: <https://www.paperrecycles.org/recycling-paper-products/what-is-recyclable-/pizza-box-recycling>.

Access study shows most programs consider pizza boxes to be recyclable and accepted.

A 2019 access study reviewed programs representing more than 50% of the population of each U.S. state and more than 60% of the U.S. as a whole. The results show the vast majority list corrugated cardboard as an accepted item while not prohibiting pizza boxes. About one-third state clear acceptance on pizza boxes, with 27% of the population being served by programs explicitly accepting them while only 11% of the population is served by programs explicitly prohibiting them. The remainder of programs are not clear on acceptance.

See the full study here: <https://www.westrock.com/pizzaaccessstudy>.

National resident survey shows most people believe pizza boxes are recyclable.

Nearly everyone (97%) says cardboard boxes should be recycled; and more than 70% say pizza boxes should be recycled. When asked why, “good for the environment” and waste reduction were the most popular reasons to recycle pizza boxes.

See more insights here: <https://recyclingpartnership.org/recycling-pizza-boxes/>

Effective Messaging

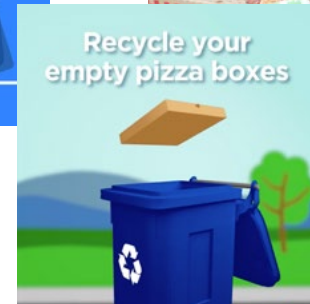
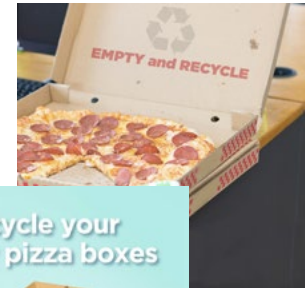
We tested messaging as part of our national survey of residents. According to the 1,400 respondents, the following messages were very persuasive and surveys confirm that while residents say recycling is easy, they appreciate clear reminders. We offer free messaging and graphics. **Download yours today.**

User-Tested Content

Download these free videos and images and sample social posts.

Survey respondents were asked to: "Please rank each message on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means it is a very persuasive reason to recycle pizza boxes and 1 means it is not a persuasive reason at all to recycle a pizza box. You can use any number between 1 and 10."

The scores for the messages were 7.8 to 8.4. Video messages with a message that "empty pizza boxes become new boxes" received the highest scores.



Customizable Postcard

Create your core messaging: Choose your material image collections and top issue icons, upload your logo, add your contact info, and download print files for two mailers and a cart tag.



DIY Signs

Create your consistent signs or labels; choose the file size and your material image collections, add your contact info, and download



Strategic Planning

In addition to free messaging resources, The Recycling Partnership offers grants, technical assistance, benchmarking information, and connection with peers.

Sign up for our newsletters to stay up to date on new reports, case studies, tools, and grants.

Click here for more free resources such as:

- MRF Accepted Materials Survey
- Anti-contamination Kit
- Drop-off Anti-contamination Kit
- Campaign Builder
- DIY Signs
- 2020 State of Curbside Report
- Bridge to Circularity Report