



A Look at Contamination Reduction in the State of Washington

City of Spokane and Spokane County, Washington

A PARTNERSHIP THAT COMBINED CITY, COUNTY, HAULERS, AND THEIR MATERIAL RECOVERY FACILITY (MRF) TO SHOW THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MESSAGING.

As with many recycling education programs, reducing contamination was the primary goal for a city-county collaborative project that took place in the state of Washington in the City of Spokane and Spokane County.

With the contamination goal at the forefront, this grant, funded as part of the West Coast Contamination Initiative would not have been possible without The Partnership's 2019 West Coast Contamination Initiative Research Report. The initiative was funded through an initial \$1 million investment paying dividends on a regular basis with a goal to increase the quality of recyclables collected curbside in California, Oregon, and Washington.

We know recycling behavior change, infrastructure improvements, and equitable collections do not happen overnight. It takes time and efforts of many to create this change. Working along the west coast, The Partnership has been collaborating with state and municipal leadership to develop tactics, best practices, and tools to recycle more and better.

Both the city and county focused on decreasing contamination, and each used similar messaging to educate residents and focus on a common contaminant – plastic bags. Between June – September 2020, the campaign was implemented, and measurements were recorded throughout to determine the program's effect on contamination.

Education at the Curb and in the Mail

In both the city and county, the first step was an information card. Being such a large geographic area of recipients, the cards were customized for each jurisdiction's accepted materials list but overall, had the same look and feel.

Primary Contaminant Continues to be Plastic Bags

The city and county knew plastic bags were consistently a problem at the local MRF. And those can be either plastic bags on their own like the ones from grocery stores, or residents bagging their recyclables and placing the full bag into their cart. Both of which, should not be in recycling carts.

Education Works

Before the initial education occurred in the city and county, an inbound MRF audit was conducted to develop a baseline for contamination. After the summer of 2020 education project, **contamination in the carts decreased by 46%**.

The work done in the City of Spokane and Spokane County is a prime example of how a city and county can work together to reduce contamination and improve its overall recycling system.



AT THE PARTNERSHIP, WE DON'T JUST LAUNCH, WE MEASURE.

Because change only counts if it lasts—we went back 7–10 months later to see if contamination rates stayed down.

READ THE FULL CASE STUDY [HERE](#) TO FIND OUT!