

Why clean your recyclables?

Cardboard

Be sure to empty out that greasy old pizza box. According to David Mendelson from [Donco Recycling Solutions](#), “A little bit of pizza grease will dilute in the recycling process, but you shouldn’t leave any melted cheese or pizza crust in there.” He warns that if enough waste like that remains in there, when it makes it to the recycling plant to be sorted, it’ll just be tossed into the garbage, otherwise it would contaminate an entire bail of paper. So, by leaving that dried up final slice of Domino’s in there, you’ve basically defeated the purpose of recycling it at all.

Plastic

“Much of recycling is still sorted by humans,” Mendelson explains, so those jugs of rotten milk are going to smell pretty miserable if you don’t rinse them out. Furthermore, plastic—and what’s stored in it—isn’t always the easiest to clean. If that gross milk becomes solid, or if you fail to wipe out that old moldy peanut butter from the jar you found in the back of your cupboard, it may be too much trouble to clean once it reaches the recycling plant, causing it to be chucked in with the regular garbage.

Metal

“Used beverage containers are the most valuable recyclable collected,” shares Mendelson. So if you’re too lazy to pour out [the last half of your beer that you didn’t finish the night before](#), no one’s going to throw it into the trash later at the recycling plant. But Mendelson as explains, “Leaving [liquid in there] could contaminate other recyclables, like paper, and attract rodents to the recycling plant.” This creates a whole new set of problems, the worst of which, we’re guessing, is dealing with all of those drunk rats.

Other metal containers, like steel cans, aren’t quite as valuable, but they’re still going to be saved and washed. If you leave a half of a can of refried beans in the can, though, the contamination issue is still going to be there, as is the increased cost of cleaning it.

Glass

Rinsing out your glass is really important. While glass may be easier to clean out than plastic, glass, in particular, has one very simple thing against it when it comes to getting recycled: Economics. See, the dirtier you leave a glass, the more it has to be cleaned and every step of that—from the sorting to the cleaning to the re-cleaning—costs money. New glass is made from sand, which, as far as raw materials go, is pretty damn cheap. So, if all this cleaning and re-cleaning causes recycled glass to be too expensive to bother with, people are just going to get new glass instead.

See, Mendelson explains, “Recycling isn’t about collection, it’s economics just like any other business.” So while those recycling companies are doing something nice for the Earth, they’re still a *business*, and they can’t pay their employees with altruism. “Keeping the recycling process cheap makes it more efficient, in the same way that buying recycled goods increases the demand for recycled goods,” says Mendelson.