

Introducing the “Recycle Right” Concept to Arlington

Juli Brazile, Arlington Recycling Committee

As many readers know, Arlington has an active Recycling Committee that works to promote recycling, reduce trash, and build awareness of related environmental issues. We work closely with Arlington’s Department of Public Works (DPW) and over the past months there has been a growing recognition, locally and nationally, that contamination of the recycling stream is a significant concern. Through a series of articles, we hope to explore these complex issues and what it means to “Recycle Right.”

Trash and recycling are everyday details that residents and government must manage. Arlington’s trash goes to an incinerator and we pay according to the weight of our trash. Any time a household can divert items out of their weekly trash, it saves the Town money. Heavy, wet kitchen scraps are the largest category of household waste that can be diverted, so expect to hear a lot more about that in this space, on the Trash & Recycling page of the Town website, and in Town email and social media.

Everyone is likely familiar with the phrase “reduce, reuse, recycle” and Arlington has put a great deal of effort into making that a reality. Most households put out one barrel of trash and significant numbers put out more recycling barrels than trash barrels. Reducing household trash is usually a two-pronged strategy: put as much in the recycling bin as possible and “recycle” household items by donating them so they can find a second use.

Weekly curbside collection of paper, cardboard, glass, cans, and many plastics is supplemented by a new monthly drop-off option for bulky plastic (a broken trash can or lawn chair) and foam materials (from rigid packaging to take-out containers). And small household appliances and e-waste can be dropped off at the DPW offices during office hours year round. The recycling guide is available online or mailed every July and is a treasure trove of details for how to reduce trash by recycling or donating many items.

People who believe in recycling have built markets for recycled materials by doing it consistently. But sometimes, our desire to never throw things away creates new problems. The best example of this contamination is the plastic shopping bag. The bag is marked with recycling symbol and the material is recyclable in special programs that expect plastic bags. When mixed with bottles and cans in a curbside bin, however, the plastic bag damages sorting equipment and lowers the profits on the materials. We hope to provide clarity on best practices so recyclers in Arlington have confidence about what materials go where.

Arlington’s Recycling Committee welcomes your involvement as a recycler, a volunteer at recycling events, or a member. Questions from recyclers will be an important and fun part of this column. There is a lot of information on the Town website (arlingtonma.gov) and from the home page it’s easy to choose the Recycling & Trash page. But if you can’t find the answer there, please visit the Town’s Request/Answer page, select “Ask a Question” and choose the Recycling category so your question is routed to Arlington’s Recycling Coordinator.