How Are Materials Sorted?

**Step 1: Pre-sort** – Before the recyclable materials enter the automated processing equipment, employees pull out trash, metal, plastic film (e.g., plastic bags, shrink wrap, etc.) and other contaminants from the conveyor belt.

**Step 2: Cardboard screen** – A huge screen separates large cardboard pieces from paper and smaller items like metal and plastic containers, which fall through the screen to other conveyors.

**Step 3: Paper screen & sort** – Another screen separates heavier items like plastic and metal, which fall through to other conveyors. Since it’s lighter, paper stays on top and moves to a separate belt, where sorters remove any non-paper items.

**Step 4: Container line** – Containers that were separated from paper enter a line where employees separate plastics by hand (based on shape) and a magnet and eddy current remove metal containers.

**Step 5: “Fine” screens** – All of the “fines” (materials smaller than 2”) that were separated during Steps 2 and 3 are sent through a vacuum system and sorted into three grades: heavy fines (glass, lids, rocks, etc.), shredded paper, and light fines (dust, dirt, etc.).

**Final Step** – After sorting, the separated materials are bundled and shipped off to buyers of raw materials.

See a short video of the whole process at [http://tiny.cc/mrf-video](http://tiny.cc/mrf-video)

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### Why is Contamination an Issue?

It is vital that we all include only materials that are clean and accepted by Republic Services in our commingle carts. MRF workers have little time to remove non-recyclable items (a.k.a. contamination) because the lines move so quickly. When we include these items, they soil other recyclables (possibly making them unrecyclable), damage equipment, harm workers who sort our material for us, and/or lower the quality of what’s being sold for recycling (making recycling more costly).

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### Top Tips for Recycling Right

1. **Remove all screw-top lids** and don’t include items 2” or smaller.
2. **Flatten** cardboard.
3. **Place materials loose in your cart** - never use plastic bags.
4. Include **plastic bottles, jars, jugs and tubs** and no other plastics! MRF employees who sort plastics look for the shape of the container, not the number.

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This guide was created by the Waste Prevention Action Team of the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition. Printing sponsored in part by Pioneer Recycling Services. For more guides and info about the Recycling Block Captain program, please visit [http://tiny.cc/wpatcapt](http://tiny.cc/wpatcapt).