

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# In Defense of Aspirational Recycling

Some call it "Aspirational Recycling".

Others call it contamination.

I understand the operational issues caused by plastic bags and loose bottle caps and other items that are not specified in a local recycling program.

However I think the better way to look at it is that these are items that well-meaning citizens think ought to be recycled.

After all, were not most of the items in the household recycling stream at one time "aspirational"? Maybe not newspaper, but certainly magazines and junk mail were aspirational. Maybe not steel cans and glass bottles, but certainly plastic bottles were.

Two of the more recent success stories from the aspirational recycling archives are aseptic cartons and plastics other than 1's and 2's. Sure, not all programs around the state recycle them, but they are becoming more and more accepted.

In both cases, there was a two-pronged approach to getting them into the stream. Avant-garde consumers wanted the products contained therein but wanted to be able to recycle the package. The manufacturers therefore set about the difficult task of making sure there was a market once critical mass was reached.

From the contamination viewpoint, certainly bags and caps can clog up the machinery. Maybe those two will never make it out of the aspirational stage. But they do have one advantage - when collected properly, both items do have markets. Clean bags can go back to a store with film collection bins and caps can be recycled when left on the bottle. So it appears that more public education can help both situations.

What else? Certainly organics. Yucky food contamination is a big issue in a MRF. So let's channel that into a separate recycling stream. Community Composting here in Rochester is working to develop its curbside collection system for delivery to local food waste recycling facilities.



**Jim Gilbert**  
**NYSAR<sup>3</sup> President**

Polystyrene foam (EPS)? That's an emotional one, no? Given enough volume, industrial recycling of the material is a no-brainer. Furniture companies Raymour and Flanigan in Syracuse and Ashley Furniture in Batavia are two of the New York companies that are doing it. Food service EPS is another issue - the industry claims the market is ready and available, but legal challenges and collection issues seem to be holding it back. Another approach to food service EPS is waste reduction and it works well in many situations, but rolling it out creates more challenges.

I am an advocate for consistency. Part of the aspirational recycling problem is that certain items are deemed recyclable in one political jurisdiction, but not the next one over. Why not? Let's figure that out and get it resolved so that we can do better recycling and broader education without stepping on toes!

The bottom line is that I like aspirational recycling. I like it when our industry is challenged to do more. I'm sorry that it causes contamination, but aspirational recycling contamination is the price of progress. We need to put our best minds to it.

For more information:

<http://www.wastedive.com/news/why-most-americans-find-recycling-confusing/404423/>

<http://www.plasticstoday.com/articles/waste-not-want-not-rethinking-unrecyclability-151204?cid=nl.plas08.20151208>

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2015/08/17/recycling-confusing-but-new-ad-campaign-helps-consumers-sort-out/30288983/>

<http://www.greenblue.org/conversation-about-current-challenges-in-the-recycling-industry/>

<http://www.ohswa.org/amirecyclable/>

For still more, search "aspirational recycling" on your favorite search engine.