



As markets tighten, SF boosts recycling efforts. Together we can.

One year ago, China announced it would no longer accept recycled materials from foreign countries and the world lost its biggest customer for bales of recycled paper and recycled plastic.

In response, some cities are pulling back from recycling. San Francisco is rising to the challenge and completed the following steps in 2018:

- Added new buyers for recycled materials.
- Completed major upgrades to Recycle Central, the 200,000-square-foot recycling facility on Pier 96.
- Delivered larger recycling and smaller refuse bins to residential properties across the City.
- Constructed a new wing on the Transfer Station to receive and transfer compostable material from the food scrap composting collection program.
- Launched the Better At The Bin Initiative to encourage and inspire everyone to be more attentive to recycling.

Paper mills and manufacturers that receive bales of recycled plastics now demand that materials shipped to them contain less than one percent impurities. Some cities say they cannot meet the new standard. San Francisco says, “Together we can.”



Smaller landfill and larger recycling bins help protect the environment.

Shipping recyclables

We strengthened our relationships with both domestic and foreign mills that purchase recycled materials.

State-of-the-art sorting systems

Recology completed a three-year, \$14 million upgrade of Recycle Central, our largest recycling plant in San Francisco. Recycle Central is now home to seven optical sorters, including new state-of-the-art sorting machines from France that allow us to sort more and smaller materials.

More recycling, less trash

We delivered 58,000 larger recycling bins (64-gallons) and 54,000 smaller refuse bins



New optical sorters (blue equipment above) and hand sorting by Recology workers help reduce impurities in finished bales of recycling.

(16-gallons) to residential properties in 2018. We updated our complement of lid stickers, which use pictures to show what goes where, and applied the stickers to 313,000 containers in the City. Here are the positive results, measured in tons collected, on routes that have received larger recycling and smaller trash bins and new lid stickers:

- Recyclables collected – up 9 percent
- Compostables collected – up 2 percent
- Refuse to landfill – down 6 percent

New infrastructure

In December we opened the West Wing, a new addition to the Transfer Station to receive and transfer compostable material collected by neighborhood route trucks. San Francisco has embraced curbside composting collection of food scraps and yard trimmings more than any other city in North America. With the West Wing completed, a \$19 million investment in new infrastructure, we aim to increase the total

tons of compostable material we collect per day from 750 tons to more than 1,000 tons.

More outreach and education

In August we launched Better At The Bin, an initiative to encourage everyone to be better recyclers and smarter consumers. The microsite includes:

- New videos highlighting solutions.
- Key facts and statistics: Globally, we consume 500 billion plastic bottles a year.
- Lists noting simple actions we can embrace to reduce trash — switching to a metal water bottle saves you \$258 a year.
- Other information that encourages each of us to do our part.

In stepping up recycling outreach and education we are posting timely and relevant information on social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Our Better At The Bin video has received more than 50,000 views since Oct. 24. Check it out at BetterAtTheBin.com.



The new West Wing gives San Francisco the infrastructure to transfer more than 1,000 tons of compostable material per day.

It is time to cut use of plastics

San Francisco Chronicle, posted Monday, December 24, 2018
by Michael J. Sangiacomo, Recology president

The good news is, our collective efforts to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost have made San Francisco the most successful big city in America at reducing what goes to landfill. The bad news is, plastics have become a huge issue for all of us. “60 Minutes” recently aired a powerful segment on plastic waste and its impact on the environment, along with the (as yet unsuccessful) efforts to clean up the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. A portion of that feature was filmed at Recycle Central at Pier 96 in San Francisco, which is Recology’s largest and most technologically advanced recycling facility.

For decades, Recology has captured plastic materials through our recycling programs in California, Oregon and Washington state, and marketed much of that material for reuse, principally throughout Asia. In other words, we had a place to send plastics.

However, a number of global policy reforms—most notably China’s National Sword program, which banned mixed plastic imports—have closed nearly all end markets for many plastic products.

Even before this door was closed, we always struggled with what to do with many of the polymers that are being introduced into the waste stream—without regard for secondary-use markets.

The European Union’s recent action to cut plastic use, in a bid to reduce marine debris, is a step in the right direction on how to deal with the issue from a policy perspective. The EU’s efforts—which are focused on mandatory recycled content in all plastic bottles and outright bans on certain single-use plastic products—deserve consideration here in the United States.

We have followed the work of innovative companies that have attempted to reverse-engineer the plastics manufacturing process, and reclaim the petroleum products from which the materials had been created. Unfortunately, none of these efforts has proven scalable—not with the enormous influx of single-use plastic materials into the marketplace.

We even tried to unlock the secret ourselves. For five years, Recology employed a chemical engineer with 25 years of plastics manufacturing experience. He was given the mission to find something that we can do to with single-use plastic waste; his work netted no practical results.

The simple fact is, there is just too much plastic—and too many different types of plastics—being produced; and there exist few, if any, viable end markets for the material. Which makes reuse impossible.

We are not out to destroy the plastics industry, but we must embrace change.

Recology would be a willing partner with plastic manufacturers to develop technologies that lead to the genuine recycling of plastic products. We can think of no better way for the industry to respond to the problem of reducing plastic wastes than offering solutions that work, can be scalable, and implemented in

communities around the world to help to solve this plastics crisis. Last week, I sent a letter to Cal Dooley, CEO of the American Chemistry Council, to invite the plastics industry to do just that.

That said, I do feel we are nearly out of time, as the planet’s oceans and wildlife are increasingly overrun by plastic waste. If the plastics industry is unable to step forward with a set of policies and programs that reverses these unfortunate trends, Recology will work to place a comprehensive policy on the next statewide California ballot—building off the EU model. We are prepared to commit \$1 million toward a

signature-gathering effort to that end and will work with all who are willing to move this effort forward.

With plastics, as with so much else, California may need to lead the way.

Michael J. Sangiacomo is president and chief executive officer of Recology, Inc., a 100-percent employee-owned company providing waste and recycling services to San Francisco since 1920. To join Recology’s campaign to reduce plastic waste and to learn more about the company’s efforts to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost, go to Recology.com.



Researchers estimate 8 million tons of plastic enter the world’s oceans each year.



Simple ways to cut plastic

Single-use plastics and excessive and unnecessary packaging are everywhere. Bananas in plastic bags. Zucchini on Styrofoam trays wrapped in film plastic. Say NO to plastic. Here are some simple ways to reduce plastic proliferation:

Carry a metal water bottle. Doing so can save you more than \$258 a year because you won’t be spending money buying water in plastic bottles.

Carry a (metal) travel mug. We don’t need single-use coffee cups, which are coated with plastic, or single-use coffee cup lids, which are made of low-quality plastic.

Carry canvas tote bags when shopping. Doing so eliminates plastic bags, which can negatively impact the environment.

Avoid excess packaging. Buy loose fruits and vegetables; bring reusable containers from home and fill them up with cereals, rice, beans, snacks and other items sold in bulk.

Refuse plastics. Refuse plastic bags, plastic straws, and other single-use plastics whenever possible.

Reuse what you can. Reusing things is even better than recycling, and it saves time, money, and resources.

Take the pledge at RefuseReuse.org.

Globally, we use 1 million plastic bags a minute. Help reduce plastic pollution, switch to canvas totes.

RECYCLING, COMPOSTING, AND TRASH COLLECTION:

Recology Sunset Scavenger
(415) 330-1300

Recology Golden Gate
(415) 330-1300

Debris Box Service
(888) 404-4008

BulkItemRecycling.com
(415) 330-1300

