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NEWS RELEASE

Recycling Contamination Rate Improves

City to Keep Educating Public About What Goes into Blue Bins

EL PASO, Texas – The City of El Paso Environmental Services Department (ESD) is yielding positive results from its recycling awareness campaign launched last year.

In the most recent audit, conducted in July 2019, the City saw an eight point drop in its recycling contamination rate compared to the previous audit from March 2019. The rate went from 34 percent to 26 percent.

“This is good news. It means our outreach initiative designed to boost public awareness about what material is accepted in the City’s curbside recycling program is working. We are going to continue with these outreach efforts to further reduce the contamination rate,” Environmental Services Director Ellen Smyth said. “What we want our customers to understand is that when things that don’t belong in the blue bins are placed in there, those contaminants turn recyclables into trash.”

The City provides recycling service to more than 185,000 homes. In June 2018, approximately 11 years after the program was implemented, the City teamed up with the Recycling Partnership to explore new ways to boost recycling awareness to reduce contamination. Contamination examples include textiles, leftover food or liquids in otherwise recyclable containers, yard waste, dirty diapers, and Styrofoam in recycling bins.

Through the partnership, two separate types of targeted outreach materials were mailed to homes. Residents who received the outreach material received a notice if unacceptable items were found in their recycling bins on their collection day. This notice, in the form of a tag attached to the blue bin, contained information that identified the contaminant found in their bin.

The Environmental Services Department followed up with this outreach effort by introducing an app that makes it easier than ever to learn about which materials are accepted in its recycling program. The ESD Works for You app is available for Android and Apple phones and provides customers with a recycling guide, custom collection day information, and allows users to set up a reminder to take their bins to the curb.

Recycling information is also available online at elpasotexas.gov/recycle. The site features a Recycle Right Wizard that allows customers to type in the name of a waste item to learn how to dispose of it properly. The recycling program accepts paper, plastic, aluminum and cardboard.

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