



# County Faced with Recycling Challenges

AUGUST 2019 —Like other communities across the United States, Southampton County is facing serious recycling challenges. These challenges have resulted from circumstances far beyond local control, placing the global recycling industry in a tailspin.

The major cause? Since the early 1990's, the United States shipped the bulk of its recycling to China—tons and tons of it, sent over on ships to be made into goods such as shoes and bags and new plastic products.

But beginning in 2018, China restricted imports of certain recyclables, including mixed paper—magazines, office paper, junk mail—and most plastics. This change in policy by the Chinese government has led to a precipitous decline in demand for recyclables.

On top of China's rejection of recyclable materials, other factors have also contributed to the weakening of the recycling industry:

- low oil prices have made it cheaper to produce new plastic bottles, so manufacturers have less incentive to use reclaimed plastic;
- packaging producers have been able to make cans and bottles thinner, resulting in significantly lower need for raw materials;
- circulation of print newspaper has plummeted, so the recycling industry has lost its primary customer for reclaimed paper fiber and their primary source of incoming recyclable material; and
- there is now very little demand for recycled glass.

This combination of factors results in a seriously stressed recycling market that you may begin to notice when visiting our convenience sites. If the recycle bin is full, it's not because someone's been negligent. It's more likely the result of a temporary backlog of recyclable materials at Bay Disposal's Material Recovery Facility in Hampton, which is where our recyclables currently go for processing.

So, what can you do to help? Remember that recycling is the final step of being a good environmental steward, and this has never been more critical than right now. Seek first to reduce, then to reuse, and as a last resort, recycle. Reduce your waste production by purchasing, consuming, and wasting less. Spend an extra moment in the aisle to determine whether you really need that plastic doodad, or consider swapping out your preferred brand for an ecofriendly alternative. Reuse things as long as possible before disposing of them for good.

As we continue to work through these challenging times, we thank you for your patience.