



Caps On Case Study – Emmet County, MI

MATERIALS RECOVERY FACILITY: Emmet County Materials Recovery Facility (MRF)

WEBSITE: <http://www.emmetrecycling.org/>

LOCATION: Emmet County, Michigan

OPERATOR: Owned and Operated by Emmet County

HOUSEHOLDS SERVED: Approximately 80,000 households in 4 counties

MATERIALS ACCEPTED: “Day-to-day” materials are typically collected in two groups:

Mixed Containers

- Plastic bottles jugs and jars (leave caps on)
- Plastic tubs, trays and cups
- Cartons and paper cups
- Metal cans, foil and trays
- Glass bottles and jars

Paper, Boxes and Bags

- Newspapers and inserts
- Magazines, catalogs and books
- Office and writing paper
- Cardboard, cereal boxes, and paper grocery bags
- Plastic grocery and bread bags

Type of Facility and Processing:

- Emmet County’s MRF switched from source separated to dual stream in 2009. During the time of the switch, the MRF began accepting additional materials including Plastics #3-7, plastic film, and plastic caps.
- The MRF keeps up-to-date on industry trends and the reactions of the market. When the industry announced that markets welcomed plastic caps, the MRF decided it would be best to have a consistent



message with what was already being said and decided to begin accepting materials such as caps.

- Emmet County currently recovers approximately 60 materials through 13 drop-sites and curbside collection.
- The MRF processes approximately 12,000 tons of recycling each year, and approximately 50-70% of plastic bottles coming down the line have caps left on.

CHALLENGES:

- Overall, the MRF has not dealt with any particular challenges or issues surrounding plastic caps.
- Caps attached to bottles are able to be included in their #1-2 bales at the same value as a regular #1-2 bale, while stray caps that are processed through the MRF are baled as #1-7 non-bottle bales, where caps actually increase the value of that bale.
- As a dual stream facility where materials are collected in the correct stream with both mechanical and hand sorting may allow for more effective capture of caps compared to most single stream facilities that experience equipment misidentifying materials such as flattened bottles and small plastic items.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- The MRF feels it is very important to keep all materials and graphics consistent when educating, and in their next round of graphics upgrades will make sure all bottles and containers visually show caps being left on.
- Generally, people tend to feel more comfortable with leaving caps on bottles in order to keep residue or stray liquid out of their recycling bin which can cause smells and attract pests. Rinsing out bottles and leaving caps on helps residents keep a cleaner recycling cart.
- Emmet County MRF has found that a great way to educate and reach out to their community is through educational public art. The MRF has partnered with local sculpture artists to create public art using recyclable materials such as a crane made from cartons, or even their very own “Emmet the Recycling Robot.” Although the MRF has not used caps in a sculpture yet, they are eager to construct a public art piece using plastic caps in the future.

EXAMPLE OF EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES:

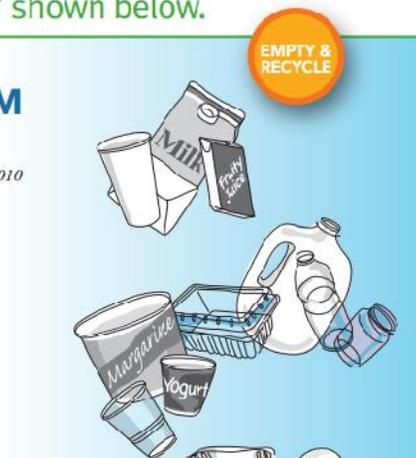
EXCERPT FROM EMMET COUNTY RECYCLING GUIDE:

materials in the two separate “streams” shown below.

MIXED CONTAINERS STREAM

- 2 Juice boxes, milk cartons and paper cups** *Added in 2010*
- NO juice pouches or straws

- 4 Plastic bottles, jugs and jars, tubs, trays and cups** *Added in 2010*
- Any plastic containers 2.5 gallons or less
 - Yes! Plastic caps and lids, on their container, are now recyclable.
 - NO Styrofoam
 - **PUT PLASTIC BAGS IN THE PAPER STREAM**



EXAMPLE OF CAPS ON WEBSITE INFORMATION:

Recycle Plastic Containers

WHAT: Nearly all plastic containers – no need to check the number!

- Bottles and jars
- Clamshells
- Cups
- Jugs
- Trays
- Tubs
- Plastic lids



For Example: #1 plastic bottles and jars, #1 plastic clamshells and trays, #2 plastic bottles and jugs, #2 plastic tubs, #5 plastic cups and lids, #6 plastic trays (clear, not Styrofoam), bakery trays, caps*, cottage cheese tubs, cookie and cracker trays, deli trays, detergent jugs, food storage containers, green plastic pint produce baskets, ice cream buckets, Keurig "Vue" Cups (remove coffee/filter pod), lids*, margarine tubs, milk jugs, mushroom trays, plastic cups, plastic bottles, plastic egg cartons, produce cartons, red Solo cups (though cups made from #1 or #5 are better), sandwich tubs, soup cups, Tupperware, yogurt cups, yogurt tubs

***NEW: Please put lids back on bottles, jugs and jars to help them make their way through collection and processing without falling out.**

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