



CARTON COUNCIL

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a carton?

Cartons are a type of packaging for food and beverage products you can purchase online or at the store. They are easy to recognize and are available in two types — shelf-stable and refrigerated.

Shelf-stable cartons, like juice, milk, soy milk, soup, broth and wine, are found on shelves in grocery stores.

Refrigerated cartons, such as milk, juice, cream and egg substitutes, are found in the refrigerated section of grocery stores.

What are cartons made of?

Cartons are primarily made of paper with a thin layer of polyethylene (plastic). Shelf-stable cartons contain a layer of aluminum as well, whereas refrigerated cartons do not.

Why should I recycle cartons?

Cartons are easy to recycle and can be transformed into everyday items like paper towels, toilet paper and even building materials. Recycling cartons decreases the amount of waste that ends up in our landfills, helps conserve our natural resources and create new economic opportunities.

How do I recycle cartons?

Simply place your cartons in your recycling bin. Communities that are single stream, share this as a next step: Place your cartons in your bin with all of your other recyclables.

Communities that have dual recycling, share this as a next step: Place cartons with your recyclable plastic, metal, and glass containers – not with other paper recyclables.





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Do I need to remove the cap when recycling my cartons?

No. Please place cartons with the cap intact into the bin. Do I need to rinse my cartons? No, you do not need to rinse your cartons. As long as the carton is empty, it is okay to place it in your recycling bin.

Should I flatten my cartons?

No, you should not flatten your carton. Optic sorters used at Material Recovery Facilities have a higher chance of recognizing cartons for proper sorting while containers still retain their 3D shape. This means cartons can be sorted more efficiently in their 3D form and should not be crushed, folded or flattened in any way before entering the recycle bin.

Do recycled cartons become new products?

Yes! Recycled cartons are turned into paper products you use every day, like tissue paper, office paper and building materials (e.g. ceiling and roofing tiles). And these “new” products are better for the environment, too. Producing paper from recycled content creates 74% less air pollution and 35% less water pollution than producing paper from virgin fibers.

Is there wax coating on cartons?

What you may see as wax on a carton is a thin layer of polyethylene, or plastic, which is recyclable too.

What happens to the aluminum and plastic left over after the carton recycling process in a paper mill?

The aluminum/plastic combination left over can be used in different ways. Some mills are using the material for generating energy, while others sell it to plastic manufacturers that use them for lumber board-like materials. In some cases, the material ends up in a landfill. Other solutions for the leftover materials are in development. In the case of building materials, the whole carton is used and the carton’s polyethylene plastic becomes the binding that holds the boards together in Continuous Materials’ products.





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Are cartons recycled into new cartons?

To maintain the integrity and strength of the carton package as a safe food grade container, using recycled fibers in new carton packages is not currently an option. However, because cartons are made with high quality paper sourced from sustainably managed forests, the paper from recycled cartons is a valuable commodity that is used in the production of other paper products.

What is the key to successful carton recycling?

I hear that cartons are ending up in landfills when collected by recycling programs. The paperboard found in cartons is among the highest quality fiber remaining in our waste stream. That's why we're working with Carton Council to ensure our community has carton recycling. They are working with mills nationally and internationally to recover valuable paperboard and recycle it into new products. Their investments in local recycling programs and technologies help communities like ours have access to effective carton recycling and sorting.

