

2 Increasing Costs and Logistics Challenges

Even before the recent changes, municipalities faced processing challenges with contamination and market challenges in finding outlets for some materials.

Glass breakage and relative weight per unit of volume makes it particularly unattractive for mixed-materials recycling, with the result that glass collected as part of curbside programs is either substantially downcycled (e.g. as cover for landfills) or not recycled at all. Meanwhile, glass contamination has degraded the value of highly marketable commodities, like paper.

The US Environmental Protection Agency estimates that just 25% of the 12.3 million tons of glass produced in 2018 was recycled.²¹

Compounding all of the challenges within the recycling industry are the widespread impacts of resource mismanagement, particularly ocean and waterway pollution and climate change. The consequences of failing to modernize the industry are dire but diffuse, with little incentive for stakeholders, from households to industry players, to engage with and implement solutions.

Taken together, the effect of recent conditions has devastated municipal recycling programs. Cities that formerly received revenue for their collected recyclables are now spending precious funds to keep their recycling programs afloat.

- Of 62 Massachusetts towns surveyed, 57 (92%) saw the costs of their recycling programs increase between 2017 and 2020. Boston's program went from a net cost of \$89,000/year in 2017 to more than \$5,000,000 in 2020.²²
- Connecticut cities and towns saw similar increases, with revenues of roughly \$20-25/ton of recyclables shifting to a net cost of \$75/ton or more.²³