

MI Reporter 8-14-19

Waste reduction in your home through recycling | Sustainable Sustainability

An Islander's guide to sustainable living.

BY NANCY WEIL AND
KAARINA AUFRANC
Special to the Reporter

How many times have you stood in your kitchen, holding a yogurt tub or milk carton and wondering, "Is this recyclable?" Don't worry, we all have and it's frustrating when you are trying to do the right thing and don't have the answers.

It feels like the rules of recycling are constantly changing... because they are. Recycling is complicated because

it is different from one city to the next, and the guidelines are changing frequently with modern technologies and global relations.

It's not surprising to learn that only 34 percent of Americans recycle at all. The world can't wait longer for people to jump into action. The time is now. The science is simple. Producing plastics, glass, aluminum and paper require a lot of precious resources and create huge amounts of pollution in our air and oceans. When we recycle all of these things, we are reusing those materials to make lots of new and

wonderful things while conserving our natural resources, and reducing air and marine pollution. There is zero downside and a huge upside to recycling correctly. Learn what the issues are and how you can do your part to help.

Recently, the world experienced real and serious repercussions to our recycling system due to the China Sword Policy. For as long as we can remember, China has accepted the world's recyclables. As of last year, they closed their doors to almost all of it. Why? The answer is simple — they were asking for all recyclable items to be sent to

them empty, clean and dry, in order to allow them to effectively and correctly recycle and reuse the materials. Instead, we were sending straight up trash. Containers could not be recycled because they were covered in moldy, sticky, substances that they, in turn, had to put into a landfill. China gave us warnings, they asked us to do things differently, but we ignored the warnings and now are dealing with a true crisis. All of those yogurt tubs, peanut butter jars and salad dressing bottles that are filled with residue

See **WASTE**, Page 14

Waste

From Page 4

are now not recyclable anymore... and never really were.

Listen up: Clean it or toss it.

Focus on big ticket items such as glass bottles and jars, aluminum cans, paper of all kinds, and plastic bottles, tubs and containers. Take the time to clean the big, easy items and then recycle them. If it isn't empty and clean, throw it out. This is hugely

important because when you are careless, you cause more harm than good. It's exhausting to hear and exhausting to do. No one likes flossing or exercising but we do it because it's how we take care of ourselves, and this is how we take care of our one and only planet. There are little tricks of the trade to make doing the right thing easier. Try tossing those hard to clean containers into the dishwasher. It will come out clean and dry and ready to be recycled.

One way to go all-in on living more sustainably is to start reusing your

containers. We send our kid's lunches in old sour cream containers, jam jars and nut canisters. When you finish your vegetable oil bottle and peanut butter jar, save them and go refill them in the bulk isle. Did you know that our very own New Seasons sells peanut butter, olive oil, shampoo, soap, soy sauce, honey and more in bulk?

It is better to slow down and recycle things correctly, than to toss lots of dirty things into the recycling bin and get it all sent to a landfill.

Wish-cycling, the

process of putting things into your recycling bin even when it might be trash because you wish it could be recycled, has become commonplace in America and is destructive to the entire system. When in doubt, sadly, throw it out.

This is a list of everything and where it goes, specifically for Mercer Island residents.

http://www.mercergov.org/files/MercerIsland_WhatGoesWhere_2018.pdf.

Email comments, questions or ideas to nancy-weil@gmail.com