

Material Quality

This fact sheet focuses on how to increase the quality of recyclables collected at bring sites. The quality of the material, for example in relation to levels of contamination, can have a significant impact on the income received from reprocessors. Unacceptable quality can also lead to material being rejected by a reprocessor; this may then require further sorting and processing to remove the contamination or in the worst case the load may need to be disposed, both of which will incur additional costs. However, feedback from local authorities indicates they are often unaware of the quality of their bring site material unless their contractor or reprocessor provides specific feedback.

Issues to consider

A number of factors affect material quality, including method of collection; how materials are transported, handled, transferred and sorted; communications with site users and how easy it is to use the sites correctly. When seeking to improve material quality, local authorities may want to consider:

- **container volume** – ensuring that appropriately sized, or an appropriate number of containers are provided for the expected volumes of material. This can help to minimise cross-contamination by other materials (i.e. when site users deposit material in another container because the right one is full);
- **servicing frequency** – linked to the previous point, if service frequencies are too low and containers overflow on a regular basis, this can increase cross-contamination of materials and compromise the quality of material for recycling. In addition to normal servicing schedules, it is important to consider additional servicing to reflect seasonal patterns of use. You may need to service containers more frequently around Christmas, bank holidays or during 'barbecue season';
- **aperture size and shape** – having appropriately sized, material specific apertures can discourage users putting the wrong materials into a specific container;
- **site layout** – as detailed in the Site Design sheet, an attractive, well-planned site can discourage misuse. Locating containers for similar materials next to each other can help to prevent contamination; e.g. place all glass containers next to each other. It is particularly important to ensure that when containers are emptied, they are replaced in the same position to make it easy for regular users;
- **site cleanliness** – providing litter bins for the disposal of bags/boxes people use to bring materials to the site can prevent them from being deposited with the recyclable materials or left by the containers. Emptying of litter bins needs to be included as part of servicing regimes – either for street cleaning or for the bring banks. Overflowing litter bins create a poor site appearance and can encourage increased fly-tipping;



Make sure the aperture size of a container is appropriate for the material being collected

- **signage and labelling** – use clear signage on site and label all containers to encourage correct use. Take particular care to reduce potential confusion: for example, banks for plastic bottles *only* can be contaminated by other plastics so use the Recycle Now plastic bottle icon to help users identify which material can be recycled. For more advice on signage, see *Communicating bring site recycling services* fact sheet;
- **feedback** – develop procedures to encourage feedback on contamination and quality issues from collection crews, contractors and reprocessors and then act on this feedback. For example, feedback about regular misuse of certain containers could highlight a need to review signage; and
- **reprocessor specifications** – be aware of reprocessor quality requirements including contamination thresholds for the materials you are collecting and ensure that signage and labelling are consistent with these specifications where possible.



Frequently asked questions

How do I improve quality of materials at bring sites?

A combination of approaches may be required to improve material quality. You will need to assess a number of factors: from what materials are collected at each site to container and aperture size, site servicing/emptying frequency and signage/labelling of containers, as well as any recurrent contamination issues. Regular communications with the collection crew/contractors will help identify any such patterns. By regularly monitoring each site (working with collection crews), you can start to identify recurrent quality issues at your sites and plan specific measures to improve quality.

How do I assess the quality of materials collected?

The simplest way to assess quality at bring sites is to conduct a visual assessment when containers are serviced or during site cleaning. This enables site specific issues to be identified. However, this may not be practical for all materials depending on the container type, so feedback from the reprocessor or sorting facility can also help identify quality and contamination issues.

Checklist

- Ensure containers are appropriately sized to manage expected volumes and minimise cross-contamination.
- Ensure site servicing frequency is adequate to meet demand and adapted to seasonal patterns.
- Check container apertures are appropriately sized for the materials to be deposited.
- Consider site layout and design to minimise potential for materials to be put in the wrong containers.
- Ensure containers are returned to their original location following servicing/emptying.
- Ensure site signage and labelling of containers is clear and consistent with reprocessor requirements, and where appropriate with other recycling services in the area.
- Consider providing litter bins on sites where there are problems with maintaining site cleanliness.