



Keep an Eye on the National Sword (Part II)

This document updates our National Sword statement published on October 20, 2017

Since the beginning of the year, one global issue has dominated the recycling conversation—China’s ban and strict contamination limits on recyclable material. These quality rules, commonly referred to as the “National Sword” have significantly impacted mixed recycling programs across globe, including here in Rhode Island. While our state has been ahead of the curve in our preparedness for this and other market fluctuations, now more than ever, we are feeling the impact of the regulations.

Since our last update, Resource Recovery has stopped shipping material to China and diverted recyclables to other international and domestic markets. While we’re fortunate to have an outlet for our material, a luxury not afforded to all Material Recycling Facilities (MRFs) across the country, the influx of material to the marketplace has significantly driven down the price of recyclable commodities. Mixed paper, for example, which sold for approximately \$95/ton in June 2017 is currently selling for -\$8/ton (up from a low of -\$28/ton). This substantial reduction in revenue will most likely result in an operating loss at our MRF in Fiscal Year 2019.

Although we may be unable to change international recycling policy decisions, we continue to position Rhode Island for success by promoting proper recycling and implementing responsive adjustments to our sorting process in the MRF. Educational resources are readily available for the public on our website, via social media, and with our municipal partners. In addition, we plan to reboot our award-winning “Let’s recycle Right!” public education campaign in spring 2019 to help decrease contamination in our mixed recycling stream. The combined effort will hopefully result in the continuation of uninterrupted movement of our material. After all, quality is key to keeping the material moving.

It is impossible to predict what the full impact of National Sword will be on the State of Rhode Island, but preparing for change and staying informed is essential. We’re committed to equipping the public and our stakeholders with the tools and resources needed to ride out the storm. At our June 2018 board meeting, we revamped our municipal grant policy to provide better access to funds for recycling education and municipal programs. Additionally, we’re encouraging our Rhode Island businesses and institutions to utilize our free services designed to start and improve commercial recycling programs.

We will continue to monitor the situation and share updates with you as they are made available. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact Marcel Lussier, our MRF Materials Coordinator, at mlussier@rirrc.org or 401-228-3128.