

Recycling Keeps Surprising

Recycling Presentation February 18, 2025

Recycling is an old road with lots of new twists, and there are no better navigators than Melissa Filiaggi, Division Chief of Maryland Environment Service, a not-for-profit-business unit of the state of Maryland, and Barbara Sollner-Webb, former professor of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and long-time environmental leader/activist. At Victoria Falls' Environmental Interest Group meeting, we heard the latest and the how's and why's from Melissa Filiaggi and Barbara Sollner-Webb.

If recycling rules change (and they do seemingly all the time), it's often because the equipment and systems improve. Ms. Filiaggi ushered us through some of the latest ones in Maryland. The single-stream procedure (all recycling goes into one bin for collection) demands attention to avoid contamination which threatens the usability of recycled material. "We sell bundle recycled output and buyers require reliably clean product for their production. If a pizza box with pizza, greasy paper, and a couple of plastic forks go into recycling, the whole recycling batch is sent to the landfill, and the hauler is fined." If the hauler knows the source, the fine is passed along.

Plastic bags are a huge problem in recycling. They get caught up in the gears and cause machines to jam. No matter what you heard or did before, plastic bags are trouble. The only safe way to recycle plastic bags is at the grocery store in their plastics recycle bin.

Other changes to the rules:

1. Make sure plastic caps are **on** their bottles after you've rinsed the bottle. Otherwise caps jam up the conveyer or worse.
2. Pay attention to the numbers in triangle on plastics. Prince George County accepts resin (what makes up plastic) #1,2,3,5 and 7 only. If you see a #4 or #6, trash them or send them to a location that will use these.
3. All recycled items must be rinsed and clean from food before you recycle them. This is a big difference from previous years. Dirty recycling is automatically sent to the landfill.
4. Shredded paper is **trash**, not recycling. Shredded paper makes a mess in the plant causing delays or worse.
5. **Styrofoam cannot be recycled under any circumstances.** There is one facility that takes it in PG County located at 1298 Cronson Blvd, in Crofton, MD.
6. Usable items like clothing; furniture; decorative or kitchen ware; toys; medical assists, like wheel chairs and walkers; and small devices, like sewing machines, blenders; pots and pans; and electronics should be donated to keep them out of landfills. Broken computers, etc should be taken to an electronics recycling pick up so that toxic materials can be removed.

But even better than recycling is getting money to recycle. That's the thinking behind a bottle bill currently facing the Maryland Legislature, according to Barbara Sollner-Webb. "Bottle bills have proved incredibly successful in every state that has initiated this system of returning bottles to grocery stores in exchange for a small reward." Landfills can't keep up with the amount of waste generated, so removing a source of waste in the form of glass and plastic bottles makes an impressive difference.

There's a right and wrong way to recycle. Learning what to do and how to do it can save significant money and have an out-sized positive effect on the environment. Disregarding the latest information does just the opposite. It can undermine everyone who is paying attention and doing it right.

By Joyce Covington, Environmental Interest Group

RECYCLING Q&A FEBRUARY 18, 2025 VICTORIA FALLS, LAUREL, MD



Melisa Filiaggi

Division Chief of Operations
Maryland Environmental Services



Barbara Sollner-Webb

Co-Chair Prince George's
Solid Waste Advisory Commission



Barbara Sollner-Webb

Professionally: Barbara Sollner-Webb was Professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine (B.S.: MIT; PhD: Stanford), where she and her students did basic research in molecular biology, focusing on RNA.

Personally: Barbara is a native of Maryland, has a daughter and three grand-kids, and she and her husband live on a small horse farm in W Laurel, backing up on WSSC's gorgeous Rocky Gorge trail (along with four wonderful horses and a crazy dog).

For ages, Barbara's main extracurricular focus has been environmental and civic matters, including having been

- a) Was a chair of WSSC's Environmental Advisory Commission
- b) Was also a long-time Commissioner on the Patuxent River Commission (fired by Larry Hogan - too environmental)
- c) Board member of Prince George's Sierra Club,
- d) Board member the Patuxent Riverkeeper
- e) Was a Board member Trail Riders of Today;
- f) Previous President of the West Laurel Civic Association
- g) Co-Chair Prince George's Solid Waste Advisory Commission

Barbara has been composting for ages, and is delighted that the County has established a world-class composting facility and is collecting the food wastes, as well as yard wastes, from residents.

However, Barbara is very disappointed that PG County has not conveyed how important composting is in reducing methane emissions from landfills, with methane as incredibly potent greenhouse gas responsible for global warming that is ravaging our world.

Please participate by composting and recycling and thereby help fight global warming!!!

Melissa Filiaggi

Division Chief of Operations for Maryland Environmental Service.

Oversees...

- Prince George's County Organics Composting Facility,
- Material Recovery Facility
- Leachate Pretreatment Plant.
- Statewide marketing of compost and recyclable commodities
- Maryland Durable Medical Reuse Program, a project in conjunction with the Maryland Department of Aging.

Melissa currently sits on the Board of Directors for the U.S. Composting Council and has over eleven years of experience in the solid waste and recycling industry.

Maryland Environmental Service (MES) was established by the General Assembly in 1970 to assist with the preservation, improvement, and management of the quality of air, land, water, and natural resources, and to promote the health and welfare of the citizens of the State.

Today, MES employs over 800 teammates and operates more than 1,000 environmental projects across Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic Region.

As a not-for-profit business unit of the state of Maryland, MES provides multi-disciplinary environmental compliance services to enhance and protect the environment through innovative solutions to the region's most complex environmental challenges.