

Frequently Asked Questions About Cartons

FAQ?

> **What is a carton?**

Cartons are a type of packaging for food and beverage products you can purchase at the store. They are easy to recognize and are available in two types—shelf-stable and refrigerated.

Shelf-stable cartons (*types of products*)

Juice
Milk
Soy Milk
Soup and broth
Wine

You will find these products on the shelves in grocery stores.



Refrigerated (*types of products*)

Milk
Juice
Cream
Egg substitutes

You will find these products in the chilled sections of grocery stores.



> **What are cartons made from?**

Cartons are mainly made from paper in the form of paperboard, as well as thin layers of polyethylene (plastic) and/or aluminum. Shelf-stable cartons contain on average 74% paper, 22% polyethylene and 4% aluminum. Refrigerated cartons contain about 80% paper and 20% polyethylene.

> **Are cartons recyclable?**

Yes! Cartons are recyclable. In fact, the paper fiber contained in cartons is extremely valuable and useful to make new products.

> **Where can I recycle cartons?**

To learn if your community accepts cartons for recycling, please visit RecycleCartons.com or check with your local recycling program.

> **How do I recycle cartons?**

Simply place the cartons in your recycle bin. If your recycling program collects materials as “single-stream,” you may place your cartons in your bin with all the other recyclables. If your recycling program collects materials as “dual-stream” (paper items together and plastic, metal and glass together), please place cartons with your plastic, metal and glass containers.

> **Wait, you just said cartons are made mainly from paper. Don't I want to put them with other paper recyclables?**

Good question. The answer is no. Once cartons arrive at your local recycling facility, they will be sorted separately from the rest of the materials. To make this work at the facility, it is easier to modify how containers are sorted than paper. In the end, as long as all cartons are sorted and baled together, the material will then be recycled.

➤ ***Do I need to remove the cap or straw when recycling my cartons?***

Yes, please remove caps and straws.

➤ ***Do I need to rinse my cartons?***

There are no requirements to rinse your cartons. As long as the carton is empty, it is okay to place in your recycling. However, you may want to rinse your cartons to ensure the carton is empty and to alleviate any potential odor problems that may arise from storing your recyclables for collection.

➤ ***What happens to cartons after they are collected?***

After cartons are collected curbside, they are taken to a materials recycling facility to be sorted and baled. The bales of recycled cartons are then shipped to paper mills, where cartons are mixed with water in a gigantic blender to extract all the paper fiber from the plastic and aluminum. The paper fiber is then ready to be used in making new products such as recycled paper products and even building materials.

➤ ***Do recycled cartons become new products?***

Yes! The recycled carton paper fibers are a valuable resource for making new products. What recycled cartons become depends on the area of the country and the mill itself. Some mills recycle cartons into tissues, while others use the paper fibers to make office paper. In some cases, they are even being used as one of the materials for wall boards manufacturing. By recycling, your cartons are put back in business as the items you use every day!

➤ ***Is there a waxy coating on cartons? Isn't that why they are difficult to recycle?***

What you may see as wax on a carton is actually a thin layer of polyethylene (plastic). Cartons are not difficult to recycle as long as the right systems are in place to do so.

➤ ***What happens to the aluminum and plastic left over after the carton recycling process in a paper mill?***

The aluminum/plastic combination left over from the shelf-stable cartons and the plastic left over from refrigerated cartons can be used in different ways. Some mills are using the material for generating energy; others sell it to plastic manufacturers that use them for lumber board-like materials. Still in some cases the material ends up in a landfill. The Carton Council is working with paper mills to find the better solution for the left over material while taking into consideration environmental and financial aspects.

➤ ***Why should I recycle cartons?***

Made from mostly paper, cartons are a natural when it comes to recycling. Plus, the paper is in demand by companies that make recycled paper products. Adding cartons to a recycling program increases waste diversion, reducing the need for disposal, and offers a potential revenue stream from the sale of cartons.

➤ ***Who is the Carton Council?***

The Carton Council is a group of packaging companies seeking to reduce the environmental impact of cartons by expanding recycling programs across the country and continuously improving cartons' environmental performance. The members of the Carton Council are Elopak, Evergreen, SIG Combibloc, and Tetra Pak. For more information, please visit www.RecycleCartons.com.