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Save taxpayer dollars by recycling smart

Fort Myers, FL, July 11, 2018 – Lee County ranks third in the state with a 74 percent recycling rate, according to data recently released by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, putting the county on track to meet the statewide 75 percent recycling goal by 2020.

But achieving that goal will not be easy.

In order to reach the 74 percent rate, Lee County's recycling contractor had to pull 19.4 million pounds of trash out of the recycling carts. That's nearly 10,000 tons of trash that should not have been placed in recycling bins. Removing it cost taxpayers \$362,871.

It is more important than ever that everyone learns to Recycle Smart. Only five materials belong in a recycling cart:

- **Metal Cans** are acceptable, including both aluminum and steel
- **Plastic containers** labeled No. 1 through No. 7 on the bottom or side. "Container" is the key word; not straws, hangers or pool noodles.
- **Glass bottles and jars**
- **Cardboard boxes** are acceptable unless it held a liquid or a frozen food
- **Papers** are accepted unless shredded or soiled

Everything in the cart needs to be clean and dry. Recycled materials are resold and no one buys materials covered in coffee grounds or lasagna. If in doubt about something, throw it out. If it's still usable, donate or sell it.

Clean recycled materials are such an issue nationwide that China, the world's largest buyer of scrap materials, stopped buying U.S. materials on May 1. That means the market for recyclable materials dropped dramatically. Lee County must offer clean materials for sale or 83,000 tons will be sent for disposal rather than be recycled.

Haulers are getting more stringent about the recycling they will collect. Recycling carts that contain plastic bags, which are not recyclable in your curbside cart, might be tagged as contaminated and left at the curb. Any recycling container containing food waste or diapers will be left behind as well as those containing items that should more appropriately be donated, such as a bedspread or sheets.

Lee County has been a recycling leader in Florida since 2002, with a recent campaign to focus on proper recycling. You can find more information about how to Recycle Smart on the Solid Waste website at www.leegov.com/solidwaste.