

Advocates consider expanding Calif. recycling

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

The fact that you drag that recycling to the curb doesn't mean it escapes the landfill.

In the years since California enacted a recycling framework, subsidized by the deposits paid on cans and bottles, people have generally been willing to do their part. Cities and counties have reflected that receptiveness by expanding the universe of materials eligible to be picked up curbside.

But putting recyclables in a bin forms just one link in a long chain allowing containers to live second lives as repurposed raw material. Once discarded goods arrive at a processing facility, their fate is governed by a simple business decision: given the resale value, is it worth the time and money to collect, separate or process?

A recent Californians Against Waste report found that most most cartons containing milk and juice end up intermingled with garbage – despite the fact that more and more cities encourage residents to toss those containers in with other recyclables. Styrofoam is technically recyclable but often becomes garbage.

“It's important to make a distinction between collected and recycled,” said Mark Oldfield, a spokesman for CalRecycle. “It quite often comes back to, what do they have locally in terms of processing capability?”

California's foremost recycling advocacy group hopes to expand that capacity. Fresh off a resounding victory as the Legislature passed a ban on the single-use plastic bags that gum up recycling machinery and clutter waterways, Californians

Against Waste is contemplating legislation to expand the type of materials covered by the state's program.

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