Steel Can Recycling

About 90% of aerosol cans are steel. They are part of the family of steel cans including food, beverage, paint and general purpose cans, as well as steel lids and closures.

There are many reasons to include empty steel aerosol cans in recycling programs:

• The more materials recycled, the fewer go to a landfill. Adding empty steel aerosol cans to a program will divert additional material from landfills, aiding in cost avoidance in terms of tipping fees.
• Volume is a significant factor in collection, processing and marketing. Adding empty steel aerosol cans to a recycling program increases the volume of steel cans.
• Additional incremental revenue due to the increased volume of recyclables is a benefit of adding empty aerosol cans.
• Local residents are generally enthusiastic about the addition of materials to recycling programs.

Steel’s magnetic attraction allows steel cans to be magnetically separated from other recyclables or from municipal solid waste. Steel can recycling end markets are steel mills, and iron and steel foundries where steel cans will become new steel products.

For additional information, contact one of the following SRI employees:

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RESIDENTIAL RECYCLING OF EMPTY STEEL AEROSOL CANS

Three basic steps to help your community recycle empty steel aerosol cans

Information from the Steel Recycling Institute
USE UP THE PRODUCT SO THE CAN IS EMPTY

1. The steel aerosol can must be empty for recycling, and it should be emptied through normal use as instructed on the can. The product and propellant are finely measured so that both are exhausted at the same time during use.

If a new can cannot be emptied due to a malfunction of the nozzle, the can should then be returned to the original place of purchase. Or, the user should contact the local recycling office to learn whether the can should be thrown in the trash or disposed of through special waste collection. This only applies to a can that may have been stored for several years and is no longer usable. If the can is functioning but no longer desired, give it to someone who will be able to utilize the remaining product.

COLLECT WITH OTHER STEEL CANS FOR RECYCLING

2. Empty steel aerosol cans should be collected for recycling along with other steel cans. Empty aerosol cans are placed in the curbside recycling bin with other steel cans and other recyclables. They may also be taken to a local drop-off location that accepts them for recycling collection.

Residents’ empty steel aerosol cans should be collected along with food, beverage and other steel cans in a community’s recycling program. Whether the program is comingled or source-separated by material, empty aerosol cans go right along with the flow of steel cans to be processed for recycling into new steel products.

PROCESS THE MIXED STEEL CANS FOR RECYCLING

3. Processing mixed steel cans is easy, including empty food, beverage, paint and aerosol cans. Following collection, steel cans are automatically magnetically separated from other recyclable materials. The cans are then typically baled, although some processors may flatten or shred them.

End market users of steel can scrap, including steel mills, accept empty aerosol cans as part of the steel can recycling mix they receive from recycling programs. When they are recycled, steel cans may become a variety of new steel products, such as new cars, appliances, toys, tools, and construction materials.