

Metrolina Recycling
and Paperboard Containers



SUCCESS STORY



See You in Another Life

Charlotte, NC, Facility Has
Recycled Paperboard
Containers for Decades

SONOCO
SUSTAINABILITY

THE CHALLENGE

Unfortunately, fewer than 15% of American households have access to material recovery facilities (MRFs) that will accept paperboard containers with metal ends for recycling. There's a faulty belief that paperboard cans with metal ends contaminate bales. The lack of visibility and education around recyclability of this packaging format means it has historically been under recycled.

THE SOLUTION

The paperboard container with metal end can be recycled in the steel stream with no impact to the stream, allowing for new beginnings with new products. The Mecklenburg Recycling Center in Charlotte, NC, has been doing just that for more than two decades. How does this work? Magnets capture the paperboard cans in a MRF, and they are baled. Then, they undergo the same recycling process as steel cans. The non-steel components in the paperboard can are consumed and recovered as energy during the steel recycling process.

Accepting paperboard cans in bales has not been considered contamination by their scrap buyers, and there is energy and reclamation value to recycling through the steel stream, said Joseph Hack, Solid Waste Management Engineer.

"There is very little paperboard can content in single stream, so we've never seen a downgrade or rejection in paper or metal," Hack said.

Sonoco's third-party MRF flow studies further validate the recyclability of paperboard containers with steel ends. The purpose of these material flow studies conducted in 2021 was to understand where the paper cans with steel bottoms would flow or sort in a MRF. To assist with these efforts, Circular Matters and Resource Recycling Systems were tapped to conduct the studies. In these studies, the capture rate for paper containers with steel bottoms and all-steel cans was the same. Through education, MRFs just like Metrolina Recycling can change the end-of-life story for paperboard containers with metal ends.

Interested in learning more about how Sonoco can help you with your sustainability efforts? Contact us at Sonoco.Sustainability@sonoco.com today!



HISTORICALLY UNDER-RECYCLED PAPERBOARD CONTAINERS

MRF RECLAIMS CANS WITH METAL ENDS, PROCESSES THROUGH STEEL STREAM

RESEARCH SUPPORTS RECYCLABILITY OF CANS WITH METAL ENDS

ABOUT THE OPERATIONS

Metrolina Recycling Center is Mecklenburg County's processing facility that sorts all of the single stream recyclable materials collected from residential curbside programs, schools and drop-off programs throughout the county and several neighboring jurisdictions.

Sonoco, more than a 120-year-old packaging provider, specializes in all types of packaging, including rigid paper containers, flexible and rigid plastic for the food industry. The Company also provides recycling services, including operating four material recover facilities and 21 recycling facilities across the Southeast.