



**RESOURCE  
SYNERGY**



## CASE STUDY

### RECYCLING CONTAMINATION & CART-TAGGING

#### RECYCLING IN CRISIS

The US recycling industry has struggled in recent years to build volume while controlling contamination. Ambitious community diversion goals and often well-intended "wish cyclers" led to many materials ending up in the recycling bin that were unsortable or had no secondary market. China's 2017 National Sword policy brought this situation to a head by severely limiting imports (due to contamination) and crushing the global market for recyclables. While little of Spokane's material was exported to China, the resulting commodity market impact necessitated a new approach. Spokane County needed to clean the stream of recyclables.

#### CART-TAGGING TO THE RESCUE

To reduce contamination in the residential sector, Spokane County and WM contracted Resource Synergy to execute ongoing cart-tagging, starting in 2020. The first year of this project was funded by a grant from The Recycling Partnership and subsequent phases have been funded through a Revenue Share Agreement (RSA) between Spokane County and WM. The team has deployed several strategies, from lid-lift inspections with "oops" tags to a single-message educational flyer left on all bins.

#### DRAMATIC RESULTS

Even after the initial phase of tagging, contamination had dropped by 13 percentage points on the lid-lift routes and 11 percentage points on the single message routes. Subsequent phases are believed to have driven total contamination into the single-digits, resulting in a recycling stream that is less than half as contaminated as it was in early 2020.

*Recycling contamination is reduced through lid-lifted inspections with tailored "oops tags," single-message tagging for all bins, each method adapting to community needs.*



**Resource Synergy's support has been tremendous. From our first cart tagging project to their ongoing support, they've remained flexible and ready to serve the needs of the county.**

**-LINDSAY CHAPMAN, PROJECT MANAGER, SOLID WASTE**