



Cart Tagging 101

Recycle Right NC

Run an “Oops! Tag” program with limited staff and resources in 10 easy steps.



Supplies needed:

- Safety vest
- Gloves
- Trash picker stick
- ID badge
- Walkie-talkie to talk to driver
- Uniform shirt
- Clipboard for address information
- Sharpie
- Route map

1 Design Your Tags.

Design your own or contact the North Carolina Department of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service [Recycling Program](#) to make customizable tags for you.

2 Determine Number of Tags Needed.

Consider if you want to tag a particular area or the whole town. How long will you implement your tagging program (i.e., eight weeks? ongoing?)? How many times will you tag an individual household?

3 Print Your Tags.

Find a vendor to print them. If you need help with funding, apply for a [grant](#).

4 Get Leadership and Public on Board.

Make sure that city/town/county administration and elected officials are aware and supportive of the upcoming tagging program. They will get calls! They need to be able to explain your efforts. Create a plan to communicate to the public about the program to address questions and complaints.

5 Form Your Team.

Select your team. Team of one is okay! Train inspectors on the standards for rejecting a cart — how to tag, how to visually assess carts, etc. Make sure that customer service representatives, department staff, drivers, and volunteers are aware of the program and how to answer questions.

6 Enforcement Policy and Measurement.

Enforcement: Successful cart tagging involves consistent enforcement. Consider giving two warnings and pulling the cart after the third violation. Also consider follow-up actions such as allowing residents to get their cart back and trying again.

Measurement: Determine how you will measure results and success. Strategies include: (1) counting the number of tagged carts on a route and see how that number changes over time; or (2) asking the material recovery facility to help you measure or estimate your community's inbound contamination rate before and after a tagging effort.

7 Choose Your Route.

Start with the most contaminated route on your most contaminated day. If you don't know, ask your drivers. They can tell you. Ask the driver for a copy of his/her route map to plan your inspections. Leave 30 to 45 minutes before the collection driver starts the route. You may have to ask them to delay their start so that you can stay ahead of the driver.

8 Conduct Inspections.

Cart inspections should only take about 10 seconds per cart. A quick glance/visual inspection should be enough; you can use your trash picker if you want to look a little deeper in the cart. Most cart contamination can be seen immediately or can be found with your nose, if not the eyes. Recyclables have a distinct scent. Rotting food, diapers, paint and chemicals can all be detected fairly easily by smell.

9 Tag Away!

When you find a contaminated cart, place the tag on the handle and turn the cart around so that the driver will know to skip that cart. Keep in contact with the driver via walkie-talkie, and keep them updated on your progress and any rejected carts. Make a note of every address that you reject with a short description of the contamination. If possible, take pictures of the inside of the cart.

10 Make Friends.

The public will want to know why you are looking in their recycling carts, so make sure that your identification badge is visible at all times. Don't ignore the people that have noticed you. Remain friendly and wave at the residents. If they ask what you are doing, explain that you are with the city/county government and that you are helping with a recycling education program. If their cart had the right items, compliment them and thank them for recycling. If there is something wrong in the cart and the resident is not combative, take the opportunity to hand them a flyer that lists the correct recyclable items. Positive interactions make a lasting impression. Keep notes on the addresses where you have such conversations with the residents.

