

## The Recycle Bin

Your weekly question and answer column on what to recycle, what not to recycle, and why. The public is encouraged to submit questions by email to [brunsrecycleinfo@gmail.com](mailto:brunsrecycleinfo@gmail.com)

### 1. Smoke Detectors

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide detectors have a fixed life, after which they are no longer considered reliable. Some even start beeping at the end of their life, and annoy you until you replace them. The question has always been what to do with them then?

Smoke detectors come in two basic models. One is an ionization device, which uses a minute amount of radioactive Americium 241. The amount is too small to be any risk to humans handling the devices, but still makes the devices Hazardous Waste. The best way to get rid of those, when they fail, is to send them back to the manufacturers. There is an excellent website, from the postal service, no less, at [https://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/2012/pb22334/html/cover\\_025.htm](https://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/2012/pb22334/html/cover_025.htm) that includes a list of the manufacturers that will take them back. These detectors all have a hazardous waste symbol attached to them.

More modern detectors use a photoelectric element to detect smoke. These contain no radioactive elements, and can be simply discarded in the trash. Absent the Hazardous Waste tag, it's safe to assume the device is a photoelectric unit, and throw it away.

### 2. Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Carbon Monoxide detection does not require any hazardous materials, just some plastics and metals that we can't recycle. Since they are not hazardous, you handle them in the same way as photoelectric smoke detectors – just put them into the trash.

### 3. Wrapping paper

With holidays coming, we need to look at this large problem. Much of the wrapping we use is recyclable, but much of it is not. What is not is any paper with foil on it, whether the paper itself is really a type of foil or cellophane, or it has shiny and sparkly designs printed on it with a plastic or foil technique.

I urge everyone to use only paper that has nothing but ink in its designs, and to then try to re-use it first, either for wrapping or packing. If it's too torn and mangled to use it again, then recycle it. If it's not recyclable paper, you will need to put it in the trash.

I even hate to say it aloud, but the default discard solution here really needs to be the trash. If it goes into recycling, but can't be recycled, we are charged to process it, and then again to put it a landfill. Until we have a processor that can do waste to energy, we need to put that stuff directly into the landfill without anyone processing it first.

Please also be aware of the same issue with gift boxes. If they are silvery or gold colored, or shiny, they probably have a plastic or foil coating on them, and they are trash. Whenever possible, we should choose white or printed cardboard boxes for our gifts. Those we can recycle.