

# Sustainability and Recycling

January 2024

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## A Deficit in our Domain

Last week, the Helena Community along with the entire state of Montana and surrounding states saw extremely low winter temperatures. As temperatures plunged to well below negative 30 degrees, the need for electricity skyrocketed. In a recent article by the Missoula Current, Northwestern Energy spoke about the increased demand for electricity. [Read the entire article here!](#)

This article highlighted the fact that due to the extremely cold temperatures, a high demand for electricity, and a lack of wind and solar energy produced, there was a “deficit of nearly 600 megawatts.” When a deficit like this happens, electricity has to be imported from outside markets. To reduce the amount of needed imported electricity, and to better stabilize the grid and keep more dollars in your pocket, there are several low-cost ways to help reduce the energy use in your home.

These include:

1. Install a programmable thermostat.
  - Automatically setting the thermostat to lower the temperature during sleeping and away hours can reduce heating costs by 10%.
  - Gradually lowering your “at home” temperature by one degree increments over time.
2. Weather stripping and caulking windows and doors.
3. Cover water heaters.
  - Covering your water heater with a water heater blanket can reduce heat loss by 25%.
4. Install low-flow faucets and showerheads.
5. Replace incandescent light bulbs with more energy efficient LEDs.

Northwestern Energy also has several resources on how to [reduce energy usage and costs](#), including [rebates](#) and an “E+ Energy Assessment.” This no-cost assessment will show you ways to make easy and affordable energy improvements. You can find more info on their [website!](#) The Department of Energy also has additional resources for Weatherization Assistance Programs on [their website!](#)

## Contamination Corrected

One of the most common misconceptions heard by the City Recycling program is that our recyclables go straight to the landfill. Although that is not the case a majority of the time, there is the occasional instance when contamination is so high, the load cannot be recycled. Cardboard is the City's largest recycled commodity. It also has the highest rate of contamination. One large contaminator is paper board. Click [here](#) for a description of the difference between cardboard and paperboard. The photos below show a load of cardboard that was picked up in the community and dropped off at Pacific Steel and Recycling by our City drivers.



This load of cardboard had to be reloaded and taken to the landfill because of the exorbitant amount of contamination. Placing paperboard in the cardboard containers may be due to a lack of knowledge or may be an example of “wish-cycling”. When “wish-cycling”, individuals “wish” the City would take a specific material and choose to put it in the City's recycling stream in an attempt to force the City to begin accepting the material. The City cannot accept paperboard as our buyer does not accept it.

Please be mindful when you are recycling and remember to do it right or you will ruin the efforts of many.