

2022 PIZZA BOX RECYCLING ACCESS STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, RRS conducted a study of the availability of recycling programs in the U.S. for corrugated pizza boxes. The study examined the prevalence of recycling programs that accept corrugated pizza boxes as well as the type of instructions provided to residents on how to recycle them.

The researchers reviewed details on recycling program guidelines for a group of over 7,500 programs representing 90 percent of the population of the U.S. The 2022 research captured access-to-recycling data in these programs, which were previously studied in two phases in 2019 and 2020. The 2019 study, which covered 60 percent of the U.S. population, included two groups of sample communities using data sets from the U.S. Census Bureau identifying the local governments in each state. The first group consisted of a comprehensive, non-random census of over 1,500 programs consisting of the largest communities in each state, in total representing at least 50% of each state's population. The second group consisted of a stratified random sample of approximately 400 smaller communities nationally, with representation from each state. The 2020 data collection included any remaining communities, ranked from largest to smallest, until 90 percent of the population was included. The 2022 study included all of these communities from 2019 and 2020 in order to provide the latest access-to-recycling data in each.

For each community in the sample, researchers independently reviewed public-facing recycling program guidelines and evaluated them for the acceptance of corrugated pizza boxes. The research team evaluated guidance on corrugated pizza box recycling in both the general guidelines and material-specific search tools/waste wizards, where available, to capture any differences between the sets of guidelines.

Instructions were coded based on how explicitly corrugated pizza boxes were included or excluded from the program's descriptive guidelines. A rating system was used to capture some of the variation in how recyclables are described by public programs and to encourage consistent interpretation by researchers.

The data was collected over a four-month period from mid-January through early May of 2022. The study findings are thus representative of that time period, while recognizing that programs and service availability in a given program are subject to change at any time.

The key findings of this study include:

- 79% of the U.S. population are estimated to have recycling programs available for corrugated pizza boxes.
- More specifically, 30% of the population is served by programs with explicit acceptance of corrugated pizza boxes and 49% of the population has access to programs that implicitly accept corrugated pizza boxes.
- The largest single group of the population is served by programs that implicitly accept corrugated pizza boxes. The vast majority of these programs have instructions that list corrugated cardboard as an accepted item while not prohibiting pizza boxes.
- Of programs that provide explicit guidance on corrugated pizza boxes, acceptance predominates; 30% of the population is served by programs explicitly accepting these containers while 10% of the population is served by programs explicitly prohibiting them.