

Garbage and Recycling in Basel

No one can argue that moving to a new country is a wonderful and enriching experience. It does, however, come with its fair share of adjustments—not the least of which involve how garbage and recycling is handled, which seems to reach a whole new level of complexity in Switzerland. When you finally get used to the additional workload and rules, you might come to realize that the system is actually quite ingenious—the more garbage you produce, the more you pay! Pay-per-use trash bags make individual consumers very aware of the waste they produce and encourage them to choose products with less packaging and to recycle whenever possible—a win-win for the environment!

As a country with a high GDP, Switzerland produces a lot of waste—on average 730 kg per person per year (or 2 kg per person per day), of which 391 kg is recycled and 229 kg is urban garbage that is incinerated. The large red and white striped smoke stack that dominates the skyline in the northwest corner of Basel is the funnel of Basel's incineration facility. The polluting soot from the smoke is captured in a series of specialized filters, which are disposed of as solid waste, thus minimizing air pollution. The heat created during garbage incineration produces steam that drives turbines and generates electricity for district households, and the extracted heat also warms 45,000 households through a 222-km pipeline network. It is therefore important that only trash intended for the garbage bag ends up in it. To enforce this, garbage bags are randomly picked up and inspected. If you are caught stuffing it with items that should be recycled or disposed of separately, you will incur a pretty hefty fine. In fact, people owing money to the canton can erase their debt by officially filtering through people's garbage and collecting the equivalent money in garbage infraction fines.

Since disposal is taken very seriously in Switzerland, it is important to be well acquainted with and follow the proper rules of garbage and recycling.

Garbage

If you live in Basel-Stadt, you will need to dispose of your garbage in a specialized blue bag called "Bebbi Sagg," Basel dialect for "Basel bag." These can be purchased at most grocery stores, but are not stocked on the shelves; they need to be purchased directly from the cashier or customer-service agent. They come in rolls of 10 and in sizes of 17 L (CHF 12), 35 L (CHF 23), and 60 L (CHF 33). *Note that each bag can weigh no more than 20 kg, irrespective of size!* If you try to put your garbage out for collection in any other type of bag, it will not only be left behind but will be adorned with an explanatory orange sticker.

If you live in Riehen or Baselland, your garbage fees are collected in the form of stickers. You can use regular trash bags (Kehrichtsäcke) that you will find on the shelves of your local grocery store, but you must place a specially purchased sticker on it before putting it out on the curb. These stickers (Abfallgebührenmarken) can be purchased in sheets from your local grocery store or post office.

If you live in an apartment building, garbage bags can be placed in the collective bin from Monday to Saturday (07:00–19:00). If you live in a free-standing house, garbage must be put out between 19:00 the night before and 07:00 the morning of the pickup.

In Basel-Stadt, garbage is normally picked up twice per week, with the days varying by zone—to determine your zone, go to www.tiefbauamt.bs.ch/entsorgung-sauberkeit/abfallentsorgung/zonensuche.html. In other communities, pickup typically occurs once a week.

What does NOT go in your garbage bag? The answer is mainly provided in the following "Recycling" section describing what, how, and where to recycle.

Recycling

Switzerland ranks top in the world for recycling, with up to 90% of recyclables being re-used or recycled for further use. A lot of time, money, work, and commitment are invested in achieving these numbers, and all residents are expected to do their part. If you live in Basel-Stadt, you receive an annual "Offizieller Abfuhrplan" (official garbage plan) in your mailbox (something similar is sent out in neighboring communities; if you have not received one, contact your local Gemeinde). This large, mainly orange fold-out plan lists the dates for the different material pickups—garbage, paper/cardboard, metal, non-burnables (broken dishes, ceramic plant pots), and greenery or garden refuse. Each of these categories have a time-table for pickup; some are picked up automatically for free (garbage, paper/cardboard, and metal) while others require either a fee (kostenpflichtig), a pre-registration (nur auf Anmeldung), or both. PET bottles can be recycled in your local supermarket, and glass, aluminum, and batteries are to be brought to your neighborhood recycling stations, normally within a 10-minute walk from your home. To avoid a fine, be sure to respect the times indicated on the recycling stations; they are normally Monday to Saturday from 07:00–19:00. If you really don't like recycling, try paying your children, or your neighbors' children (after discussing with their parents), to pick up your recycling every week or two! For other types of recyclable items, there are local "Sammelstellen" (collection sites) near you. For a list and an interactive map of Basel showing all the locations where recyclables can be brought, go to www.stadtplan.bs.ch/geoviewer, and click on "disposal" on the right side of the page. Select your category of interest from the menu on the right and click on the item (eg, bio-waste, corks, clothing) to get a list of the drop-off locations, or check the box to have the location appear on the interactive map of Basel.

Another terrific site to help you locate a recycling drop-off location is <http://recycling-map.ch/en>. On this site, you enter your town and/or postal code to get a list and even a map showing each location; note that this site is organized more by location than by type of recycled goods.

Specific Recycling Instructions

Please note that the following instructions apply to Basel-Stadt—other communities may have different rules and procedures!

Paper / Cardboard: Paper and cardboard are collected every four weeks from the curb outside your home. Paper should be bound in neat little squares tied with a special string (which can be bought at your local supermarket), and cardboard should be kept separate. Be sure to remove all tape, staples, plastic, packing, and other foreign materials or it will be left behind with an instruction sticker on how to do it right.

Glass: Bottles, jars, and other types of glass need to be taken to a recycling station near you. You need to sort the glass by color and throw it into either the “weiss” (white), “braun” (brown), or “grün” (green, blue, brownish-green, essentially all glass other than white or brown) container or section.

Aluminum: At the local recycling station, there is also a bin for aluminum, including all tins, tea-light metal, aluminum foil, yogurt covers, etc.

Aluminum Coffee Capsules: Do not dispose of metal coffee capsules such as Nespresso in the garbage bag or metal/aluminum recycling. These can be returned directly to a Nespresso shop or dealer or picked up from your mailbox with your coffee delivery in a specially-conceived Nespresso recycling bag (see the Nespresso website for details on their pick-up program in your area). Other coffee capsules made of synthetic materials go in the garbage bag.

Other Metals: Any metal that is not aluminum (tools, chairs, lamps, etc.) does not belong in the aluminum recycling bins. Put them out on the curb on metal-recycling day (check the Abfuhrplan for dates).

Bicycles: Bikes, even those that are no longer rideable, should be dropped off at one of the designated “Bikes for Africa” locations (<http://velafrica.ch/fr/Ce-que-nous-faisons>). Every year, these bikes are returned to working order and shipped from Switzerland to Africa, where they facilitate the lives of poor people who need to travel long distances each day.

PET Bottles: Plastic drink bottles made of Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) should be recycled at the grocery store. As the slogan “Luft raus—Deckel drauf” states, you should first flatten the bottles to push out the air and then recap them to prevent them from re-expanding.

Other Plastic Bottles: Plastic bottles such as white milk bottles, opaque bottles, as well as bottles for products such as shampoo, ketchup, and laundry soap should be recycled in the other bin for plastic bottles at the grocery store, normally adjacent to the PET bins.

Other Plastics: Non-PET plastics, such as packaging used for salads, meats, and cheese, are not recycled in Switzerland because to make them hermetically sealable, they are normally made of composite materials, making them difficult to recycle or reuse. In fact, in many countries where they are collected, they are simply burned—the same fate they meet in Switzerland by being thrown into the trash bag, rather than contaminating the recycled plastic and requiring triage.

Batteries: Batteries should never be disposed of in your garbage bags, especially since garbage is incinerated! They contain toxic materials as well as valuable reusable materials (metals, zinc, ferromanganese,

and mercury); the high cost of batteries in Switzerland reflects the high cost of recycling their various components. They should be placed in the special small yellow boxes near the glass/aluminum recycling stations, or in the designated box at the supermarket next to the PET recycling.

Milk / Drink Cartons: Milk and juice that comes in Tetra-Paks (a wax-impregnated cardboard box with cap) is not yet recycled here in Switzerland. A 2-year pilot project has just been concluded to determine the cost/benefit of recycling this type of packaging, but in the interim, they simply go into your garbage bag for eventual incineration.

Compost: Food waste from your kitchen (vegetable/fruit peels, coffee grounds, leftover or spoiled food) should be composted in your own garden. If you don't have a garden, most apartment blocks have a composting program. If that is not possible, there may be a community or neighborhood composting site—inquire with a neighbor or with your local Gemeinde. If you require advice on private composting, call 061-377-8981.

Garden Greens: Garden clippings such as plants, leaves, grass, and branches (up to 10 cm in diameter) are to be put out on the curb on the dates indicated for “Grüngut” on your Abfuhrplan. This is done at a cost, which varies from CHF 3 to CHF 14 depending on the volume of the pickup, and you must call 061-385-1515 to register the pickup by noon on the preceding day. These need to be put in a bound open bundle (for sticks and branches) or a suitable container, such as a green-goods container, air- and water-permeable bag, or open basket; green goods in plastic bags will not be taken! Note that the maximum weight is 20 kg per container or bundle.

Larger garden refuse (Häckselmaterial), such as large branches and tree trunks that are not reducible with tree shears (no longer than 1.5 m) should be bundled and tied with coconut string and put out on the curb on the dates indicated on your Abfuhrplan. Up to 1 m³ per household is picked up for free; however, you will need to call 061-701-4025 up until noon on the preceding workday to trigger a pickup.

Corks: Cork is a valuable natural product that should never be thrown in the trash as it can be reused for new purposes, including floor coverings, pin boards, embankment materials, and even fashion accessories. So instead of throwing your wine corks in the trash, consider keeping a cork-recycling container next to your glass, metal, and paper bins; be sure, however, to remove the synthetic corks as those do belong in your garbage bag. There are currently 67 cork-recycling stations across Switzerland where you can drop off your old corks. Visit www.korken.ch/kork_sammelstellen.htm to find a cork-recycling location near you. In addition, most wine stores where you buy your wine will accept the corks for recycling.

Electronics: All electronic and household appliances such as TVs, VCR's, coffee machines, hairdryers, telephones, computers, lawnmowers, printer toner and ink, CDs, and DVDs must be brought to any store or location that sells similar items (eg, Interdiscount, Media Markt, Jumbo). They are required by law to take the items for free; if there is no obvious box or depot location in the front of the store, simply ask an employee where to place them. These recyclables contain many pre-



cious materials (eg, copper, gold, silver) as well as toxic materials (eg, cathode tubes), and it is therefore important that they be properly recycled. All electrical and electronic items purchased in Switzerland carry a disposal tax that is paid upon purchase to cover the cost of recycling.

Styrofoam / Polystyrene: So much of what we buy today comes with some quantity of packaging materials. Small amounts can be put in your garbage bag, but larger amounts should be put out on the curb with a “Sperrgut Vignette” sticker. Small styrofoam “peanuts,” or the trays from meat, fruit, and cheese packaging should go in the regular trash. To recycle any styrofoam materials, it is important that they not be contaminated, so be sure that they are not soiled and free from tape, staples, or other foreign materials.

Clothing / Shoes: A victim of the latest trends and styles, 60% of clothes and textiles destined for recycling are still in perfect condition, with only 35% actually ready for recycling. In Switzerland, there are organizations like TEXAID or Tell-Text that make it their mission to collect and hand-sort cloth goods, either from collection bins or directly from your home by delivering bags for clothes, textiles, and shoes with a date for curb pick-up. Clothing in good condition is then sold in bulk to needy countries, with proceeds going to charity or social projects in Switzerland and abroad; all other textiles are recycled into rags or cleaning cloths in Bulgaria or Hungary. Check www.stadtplan.bs.ch/geoviewer to find a clothing donation box near you.

Furniture / Household Goods: If these are in good condition, consider dropping them at one of the second-hand shops (Brockenstube or Brocki) like the Heilsarmee (Salvation Army) in Basel. These are often charitable, so your donation can help others. If the items are relatively large, you can also call them for a pickup (Abholdienst), but bear in

mind that it may take a couple of weeks to get an appointment (www.brocki.ch/abholdienst).

If they are not in working order and must be disposed of, you can put broken, burnable household items (that are not listed elsewhere in this recycling section and don't fit in your trash bag, such as suitcases or chairs), out on the curb on garbage pickup days with one sticker (Sperrgut Vignette) for items under 10 kg. You should have received two such stickers with your annual Abfuhrplan, but they can also be purchased from any Kiosk or customer-service desk for CHF 4.50 each. Items greater than 10 kg require one sticker per 10 kg as well as a call to the Sauberkeitshotline (cleanliness hotline) at 061-385-1515, to register the pickup. While it is common for people to put items out on the sidewalk with a sign “Gratis zum Mitnehmen” (free to take), this is not a legal practice and can incur a fine, if caught.

Non-Burnable Household Items: Broken items that cannot be burned in the incinerators, such as ceramics, dishes, mirrors, broken windows, etc. should be put out on the curb on the pick-up days identified on your Abfuhrplan for “Unbrennbares” (non-burnable). You will need to affix a “Sperrgut Vignette” sticker for each 10 kg and call 061-385-1515 until noon of the preceding day to trigger the pickup.

Light Bulbs: The proper disposal of certain lighting materials (neon tubes, LEDs, energy-saving bulbs, mercury or sodium gas lights) is obligatory! These should be brought back to any point of sale. Older light bulbs (eg, incandescent or halogen bulbs) go into the regular trash bag and not in the glass recycling.

Medications: Unused or expired medications should be brought to a pharmacy (Apotheke or Drogerie) for proper disposal—do not flush them down the toilet as some chemicals, like hormones, are difficult to remove from the water.

All Other Special Waste Products: Special items such as paints, lacquers, cosmetics, cleaning products, oils, grease, fire extinguishers, solvents, tires, etc. must be disposed of properly as they are not only harmful to the environment, but also to humans through water, soil, and air contamination. Most can be brought back to their point of sale for proper disposal. You can also bring these items to an “Annahmestelle für Sonderabfälle” (location for special waste); you can find the one nearest you at www.stadtplan.bs.ch/geoviewer, by clicking on “disposal” on the right side of the page and then selecting the appropriate category (eg, tires, animal carcasses).

If you are moving or undertaking a big spring-cleaning project and have many items to dispose of but don't want to wait for pickup days, you can always drive your junk to a Recyclingpark (the modern-day version of a junkyard). The disposal of some items there is free; however, others will incur a cost, either by item or weight (*hint: heavy items like televisions are very costly to dump, so it is best to dispose of them at an electronics shop*). Check the table for a recycling park in your area.

Fun Fact—Mouse Tail Collection

Did you know that in some communities near Basel you can collect the tails of any mice you catch and make money with them? In earlier times the “Mäuseschwanz Abgabe” (mouse tail drop-off) was even more common in an effort to control mouse and vole populations in the fields, where they could damage roots and bulbs of plants. But even now, numerous communities continue the practice and sometimes receive several thousand tails per year. When the mice are caught, the tails are cut off and stored until the collection day, when they are taken to a designated collection site and the catcher receives a premium of around CHF 1 per tail. Particularly some farmers, but also some kids, use this as a way to earn extra pocket money, setting up special traps that quickly kill the mice in the fields. But the mouse tails have to be dry and clean and you have to drop them off in person—one community specified that they can't be sent in by mail!

RECYCLING PARK	LOCATION	OPENING HOURS
Lottner Recyclingpark www.lottner.ch	Schlachthofstrasse 18, Basel	Mo–Fr: 6:30–11:45 & 12:45–16:15 Sat: 8:00–14:45
Mobiler Recyclingpark Riehen www.riehen.ch/leben-und-wohnen/abfall-und-entsorgung/mobiler-recyclingpark-riehen	Otto Wenk-Park, Riehen	Last Saturday of the month: 9:00–13:00
Waser Entsorgung AG www.waserag.ch	Langenhagstrasse 50, Birsfelden	Mo–Fr: 7:30–11:45 & 13:00–16:45 (16:30 on Fr) Sat: 9:00–13:00
	Oberwilerstrasse 48, Therwil	Mo–Fr: 7:00–11:45 & 13:00–16:45 (16:30 on Fr) Sat: 9:00–13:00
	Gewerbestrasse 5A, Sissach	Mo–Fr: 7:00–11:45 & 13:00–16:45 (16:30 on Fr) Sat: 9:00–13:00
	Industrie-Ost, Rheinfelden	Mo–Fr: 7:00–11:45 & 13:00–16:45 (16:30 on Fr) Sat: 9:00–13:00
Recycling-Paradies www.recycling-paradies.ch	Mattenstrasse 1, Industrie Moos, Reinach	Mo–Sat: 8:00–12:00 & 13:00–18:00
REWAG Recycling & Entsorgung www.rewag-entsorgung.ch/recycling_und_entsorgung	Rinaustrasse 663, Kaiseraugst	Mo–Fr: 07:00–12:00 & 13:00–17:00 Sat: 09:00–14:00