Plastics Recycling by the Numbers

Plastic is the most complicated material to recycle, in part because consumers don’t often know what types can be recycled and often it differs from community to community. Products made of plastic are often stamped with a resin code which can be used to determine what type of plastic was used to make the product. The resin code is a number between one and seven that is located inside a small triangle made of arrows. We will recycle 1, 2, and 5 plastics.

Unfortunately, it’s not viable for us to accept hard-to-process 3, 4, 6, and 7 plastic products like Styrofoam, PVS, Plastic Bags, and Plastic Wrapping. They are either complicated to process, can get tangled in the recycling equipment, or have little to no end user market at the time of processing.

1: PET or PETE (Polyethylene terephthalate)
PET or PETE is one of the most commonly used plastics in consumer products and used to make bottles for soda, water and other drinks. It’s also used to make cooking oil containers, plastic peanut butter jars and containers for other popular food items. To use less PET plastic, consider switching to reusable beverage containers and replacing disposable food packaging with reusable alternatives.

PET/PETE products CAN be recycled. YES!

2: HDPE (High density polyethylene)
HDPE are the stiff plastics used to make milk jugs, shampoo bottles, cleaning product containers and detergent bottles. HDPE plastic is very hard-wearing and does not break down under exposure to sunlight or extremes of heating or freezing. For this reason, HDPE is used to make picnic tables, plastic lumber, waste bins, park benches, bed liners for trucks and other products which require durability and weather-resistance.

HDPE products CAN be recycled. YES!

3: PVC (Polyvinyl chloride)
PVC is a soft, flexible plastic, so it’s used for a huge array of household products. Plastic tubing, kids’ toys, plastic trays and furniture are often made from PVC.

PVC products CANNOT be recycled. No recycling of #3.

4: LDPE (Low density polyethylene)
LDPE is often found in shrink wraps, dry cleaner garment bags, squeezable bottles, and the type of plastic bags used to package bread and hold produce. The plastic grocery bags used in most stores today are made using LDPE plastic.

To cut down on the amount of LDPE that you consume, try replacing your plastic grocery bags with fabric alternatives and bringing reusable produce bags. You can also replace plastic sandwich bags with platinum silicone alternatives, which are heat safe.

LDPE products CAN SOMETIMES be recycled. Not for St John
5: PP (Polypropylene)
Polypropylene plastic is tough and lightweight and has excellent heat-resistance qualities. It serves as a barrier against moisture, grease and chemicals. When you try to open the thin plastic liner in a cereal box, it is polypropylene. This keeps your cereal dry and fresh. PP is used to make the food containers used for products like yogurt, sour cream and margarine. It’s also made into straws, rope, carpet and bottle caps.

To cut down on how much PP you consume, opt for reusable straws instead of plastic ones, reusable water bottles, and cloth diapers.

PP products CAN SOMETIMES be recycled. YES!

6: PS (Polystyrene)
Styrofoam products are made from PS plastic, so it’s commonly used to make disposable coffee cups, packing peanuts, coolers and to-go food containers.

PS products CAN SOMETIMES be recycled. Not for St John.

7: Other
Any type of plastic that doesn’t fit into one of the first six categories falls under this heading. Products stamped with a 7 are often made from multiple plastic types or out of other types of plastic that can’t easily be recycled.

A new generation of compostable plastics, made from bio-based polymers like corn starch, is being developed to replace polycarbonates. These are also included in category #7, which can be confusing to the consumer. These compostable plastics have the initials “PLA” on the bottom near the recycling symbol. Some may also say “Compostable.”

#7 products CAN SOMETIMES be recycled. Not for St John.

We know that plastics recycling can be confusing. Please contact us with questions.

Adapted from an article by:
Randy Miller, February 10, 2019