

A Closer Look at Plastics

There are many types of plastic in use. Plastic must be sorted by type for recycling, since each type melts at a different temperature and has different properties. The plastics industry has developed an identification system to label different types of plastic. The system divides plastic into seven distinct groups and uses a number code generally found on the bottom of containers. The following table explains the seven code system.



Plastic #1: Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET)
Common uses: 2 liter soda bottles, cooking oil bottles, peanut butter jars.

This is the most widely recycled plastic and the only one with a redemption value under the California "Bottle Bill." Recycling programs and centers request that you remove caps and flatten the bottles.



Plastic #2: High Density Polyethylene (HDPE)
Common uses: detergent bottles, milk jugs, grocery bags.

Most curbside recycling programs accept rigid narrow neck containers. Check the curbside recycling matrix on page 12 or contact your curbside recycling service provider about whether it accepts plastic #2 and if containers need to be sorted by color.



Plastic #3: Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)
Common uses: plastic pipes, outdoor furniture, shrink wrap, water bottles, salad dressing and liquid detergent containers.

Recycling centers rarely take #3 plastic. Look for alternatives whenever possible.



Plastic #4: Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE)
Common uses: dry cleaning bags, produce bags, trash can liners, food storage containers.

Recycling centers rarely take #4 plastic. Look for alternatives whenever possible.



Plastic #5: Polypropylene (PP)
Common uses: aerosol caps, drinking straws.

Recycling centers rarely take #5 plastic. Look for alternatives whenever possible.



Plastic #6: Polystyrene (PS)
Common uses: packaging pellets or "Styrofoam peanuts," cups, plastic tableware, meat trays, to-go "clam shells."

Many shipping/packaging stores will accept polystyrene peanuts and other packaging materials for reuse. Cups, meat trays, and other containers that have come in contact with food are difficult to recycle. If you have large quantities, call the Alameda County Recycling Hotline.



Plastic #7: Other
Common uses: certain kinds of food containers and Tupperware.

This plastic category, as its name of "other" implies, is any plastic other than the named #1 – #6 plastic types. These containers can be any of the many different types of plastic polymers. Recycling centers rarely take plastic #7. Look for alternatives.

Special Note: Plastic recycling can be very confusing. One way to think about the different types of plastic is to compare plastic to fruit. Not all fruit is the same. An apple is not an orange. Not all plastic is the same. Plastic #1 is not plastic #5. Even within the same plastic group there are differences. Consider apples. A red apple is not a green apple. A plastic #2 narrow neck milk jug is not the same as a plastic #2 wide mouth yogurt cup.

Keep the value of plastic high by placing only those types that are accepted for recycling in your recycling container.