



# What Do Plastics Recycling Symbols Mean?

## **Number 1 Plastics: PET or PETE (polyethelene terephthalate)**

- Products: Soft drinks, water and beer bottles, mouthwash bottles, peanut butter containers, salad dressing and vegetable oil containers, microwaveable food trays and clamshells, and more.
- Recycling: Pick up available through most curbside recycling programs.
- Recycled Into: Polar fleece, fiber, tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling, straps, (occasionally) new containers

It poses low risk of leaching breakdown products. Recycling rates remain relatively low (around 20 percent), though the material is in high demand by manufacturers.

## **Number 2 Plastics: HDPE (high density polyethylene)**

- Products: Milk jugs, juice bottles, bleach, detergent and household cleaner bottles, shampoo bottles, some trash and shopping bags, motor oil bottles, cereal box liners, and more.
- Recycling: Pick up available through most curbside recycling programs (some only allow containers with necks).
- Recycled Into: Laundry detergent bottles, oil bottles, pens, recycling containers, floor tile, drainage pipes, lumber, benches, doghouses, picnic tables, fencing, toothbrushes, and more.

HDPE carries low risk of leaching and is readily recyclable into many goods.

## **Number 3 Plastics: PVC (Polyvinyl chloride) or V (Vinyl)**

- Products: Window cleaner and detergent bottles, shampoo bottles, cooking oil bottles, clear food packaging, wire jacketing, medical equipment, siding, windows, piping, and other hard plastic items.
- Recycling: Rarely recycled; accepted by some plastic lumber makers.
- Recycled Into: Decks, paneling, mudflaps, roadway gutters, flooring, cables, speed bumps, mats, and more.

PVC contains chlorine; manufacturing it can release highly dangerous dioxins. If you must cook with PVC, don't let the plastic touch the food. Never burn PVC because it releases toxins.

#### **Number 4 Plastics: LDPE (low density polyethylene)**

- Products: Squeezable bottles, bread, frozen food, dry cleaning and shopping bags, tote bags, clothing, furniture, carpet, and many more products.
- Recycling: LDPE is not often recycled through curbside programs, but some communities will accept it. Plastic shopping bags can be returned to many stores for recycling.
- Recycled Into: Trash can liners and cans, compost bins, shipping envelopes, paneling, lumber, landscaping ties, floor tile, and more.

Historically, LDPE has not been accepted through most American curbside recycling programs, but more and more communities are starting to accept it.

#### **Number 5 Plastics: PP (polypropylene)**

- Products: Some yogurt containers, cottage and sour cream containers, syrup bottles, ketchup bottles, caps, straws, medicine bottles, plastic clamshells, and more.
- Recycling: Number 5 plastics can be recycled through some curbside programs.
- Recycled Into: Signal lights, battery cables, brooms, brushes, auto battery cases, ice scrapers, landscape borders, bicycle racks, rakes, bins, pallets, trays, and more.

Polypropylene has a high melting point, so it is often chosen for containers that must accept hot liquid. It is gradually becoming more accepted by recycling programs.

#### **Number 6 Plastics: PS (polystyrene)**

- Products: disposable plates and cups, meat trays, egg cartons, carry-out containers, aspirin bottles, compact disc cases, and more.
- Recycling: Number 6 plastics can be recycled through some curbside programs
- Recycled Into: Insulation, light switch plates, egg cartons, vents, rulers, foam packing, carry-out containers, and more.

Polystyrene can be made into rigid to foam products, known as Styrofoam. Evidence suggests polystyrene can leach potential toxins into foods. The material was long on the environmentalist's hit list for dispersing widely across the landscape and for being notoriously difficult to recycle.

#### **Number 7 Plastics: Miscellaneous**

- Products: Three- and five- gallon water bottles, 'bullet-proof' materials, sunglasses, DVDs, iPod and computer cases, signs and displays, certain food containers, nylon, and more.
- Recycling: Number 7 plastics have traditionally not been recycled, though some curbside programs now accept them.
- Recycled Into: Plastic lumber and other custom-made products.

A wide variety of plastic resins that don't fit into the previous categories are lumped into number 7. Many new number 7 plastics are made from plants, and some are combustible. Polycarbonate is number 7; studies have shown it can leach potential hormone disruptors.