

What do the recycling symbols on plastics mean?

(Source: <http://ecomaidsofla.com/blog/2009/10/20/what-do-recycling-symbols-on-plastics-mean/>)

Here is your guide to figuring out what those recycling codes on plastics mean.

Sometimes it seems like the modern world is one colossal plastic palace. The versatile material is in our cars, toys, packaging, clothing, home goods, food utensils, medical devices and so much more.

It is also littering our streets, clogging our waterways and choking marine life. Many plastics can be readily recycled, but how do consumers make sense of all the different types and rules?

PLEASE NOTE that the Kechara Earth Project recycling activity does not take Number 6 and 7 plastics, and those without any symbols.

Number 1 PET or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate)



PET plastic is the most commonly plastic for single-use bottled beverages because it is inexpensive, lightweight and easy to recycle. It poses low risk of leaching breakdown products. Recycling rates remain relatively low (around 20%), though the material is in high demand by re manufacturers.

FOUND IN Soft drink, water and beer bottles; mouthwash bottles; peanut butter containers; salad dressing and vegetable oil containers; ovenable food trays.

RECYCLING Picked up through most kerbside recycling programmes.

RECYCLED INTO Polar fleece, fiber, tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling, straps, (occasionally) new containers

Number 2 Plastics HDPE (high density polyethylene)



HDPE is a versatile plastic with many uses, especially for packaging. It carries low risk of leaching and is readily recyclable into many goods.

FOUND IN Milk jugs, juice bottles; bleach, detergent and household cleaner bottles; shampoo bottles; some trash and shopping bags; motor oil bottles; butter and yoghurt tubs; cereal box liners

RECYCLING Picked up through most kerbside recycling programmes, although some allow only those containers with necks

RECYCLED INTO Laundry detergent bottles, oil bottles, pens, recycling containers, floor tile, drainage pipe, lumber, benches, doghouses, picnic tables, fencing

Number 3 Plastics V (Vinyl) or PVC



PVC is tough and weathers well so it is commonly used for piping, siding and similar applications. PVC contains chlorine, so its manufacture can release highly dangerous dioxins. If you must cook with PVC, don't let the plastic touch food. Also never burn PVC, because it releases toxins.

FOUND IN Window cleaner and detergent bottles, shampoo bottles, cooking oil bottles, clear food packaging, wire jacketing, medical equipment, siding, windows, piping

RECYCLING Rarely recycled; accepted by some plastic lumber makers

RECYCLED INTO Decks, paneling, mudflaps, roadway gutters, flooring, cables, speed bumps, mats

Number 4 Plastics LDPE (low density polyethylene)



LDPE is a flexible plastic with many applications. Historically it has not been accepted through most kerbside recycling programmes, but more and more communities are starting to accept it.

FOUND IN Squeezable bottles; bread, frozen food, dry cleaning and shopping bags; tote bags; clothing; furniture; carpet

RECYCLING LDPE is not often recycled through kerbside programmes, but some communities will accept it. Plastic shopping bags can be returned to many stores for recycling

RECYCLING INTO Trash can liners and cans, compost bins, shipping envelopes, paneling, lumber, landscaping ties, floor tile

Number 5 Plastics PP (polypropylene)



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

FOUND IN Some yoghurt containers, syrup bottles, ketchup bottles, caps, straws, medicine bottles

RECYCLING Number 5 plastics can be recycled through some kerbside programmes

RECYCLED INTO Signal lights, battery cables, brooms, brushes, auto battery cases, ice scrapers, landscape borders, bicycle racks, rakes, bins, pallets, trays

Number 6 Plastics PS (polystyrene)



Polystyrene can be made into rigid or foam products - in the latter case it is popularly known as the trademark Styrofoam. Evidence suggests polystyrene can leach potential toxins into foods. The material was long on environmentalists' hit lists for dispersing widely across the landscape, and for being notoriously difficult to recycle. Most places still don't accept it, though it is gradually gaining traction.

FOUND IN Disposable plates and cups, meat trays, egg cartons, take-away containers, aspirin bottles, compact disc cases

RECYCLING Number 6 plastics can be recycled through some kerbside programmes

RECYCLED INTO Insulation, light switch plates, egg cartons, vents, rulers, foam packing, take-away containers

Number 7 Plastics Miscellaneous



A wide variety of plastic resins that don't fit into the previous categories are lumped into number 7. A few are even made from plants (polyactide) and are compostable. Polycarbonate is number 7, and is the hard plastic that has parents worried these days, after studies have shown it can leach potential hormone disruptors.

FOUND IN Three- and five-gallon water bottles, 'bullet-proof' materials, sunglasses, DVDs, iPod and computer cases, signs and displays, certain food containers, nylon

RECYCLING Number 7 plastics have traditionally not been recycled, though some kerbside programmes now take them

RECYCLED INTO Plastic lumber, custom-made products