

Recycling: Decoding the Numbers



safe and readily recyclable

PET or PETE - Polyethylene Terephthalate

- **Found In:** Soft drink, water and beer bottles; many common food packages including peanut butter containers, salad dressing, and vegetable oil containers.
- **Recyclable?** Readily recyclable through most curbside recycling programs.
- **Recycled Into:** bottles, polyester fibers fiber, tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling
- **Environmental & Health:** low risk of leaching breakdown products

HDPE - High density Polyethylene

- **Found In:** Milk jugs, juice bottles; bleach, detergent and household cleaner bottles; hair care products, motor oil containers, shampoo bottles; some trash and shopping bags; motor oil bottles; butter and yogurt tubs; cereal box liners
- **Recyclable?** Readily recyclable through most curbside recycling programs (some containers with necks are not allowed)
- **Recycled Into:** Laundry detergent bottles, oil bottles, pens, recycling containers, floor tile, drainage pipe, lumber, fencing
- **Environmental & Health:** low risk of leaching breakdown products

sometimes recycled

LDPE Low-density Polyethylene

- **Found In:** dry cleaning and shopping bags, sandwich bags, squeezable bottles; bread and frozen food packaging, furniture, carpet
- **Recyclable?** Not often accepted through curbside programs, though more communities are accepting it (check with your local government).
- **Recycled Into:** Trash can liners and cans, compost bins, shipping envelopes, paneling, lumber, landscaping ties, floor tile
- **Environmental & Health:** generally considered safe.

PP - Polypropylene

- **Found In:** hot food/liquid containers, syrup bottles, ketchup bottles, caps, straws, medicine bottles
- **Recycling:** Can be recycled through some curbside programs.
- **Recycled Into:** fibers, bottles, battery cables, brooms, brushes, ice scrapers, bicycle racks, rakes, bins
- **Environmental & Health:** generally considered safe.

toxic properties, not easily recyclable

V (Vinyl) or PVC - Polyvinyl Chloride

- **Found In:** Window cleaner, detergent bottles, shampoo bottles, cooking oil bottles, clear food packaging, toys, furniture, siding, windows, piping
- **Recyclable?** Rarely recycled, as the material itself is difficult to recycle.
- **Recycled Into:** Decks, paneling, mud flaps, flooring, cables, speed bumps, mats
- **Environmental & Health:**
 - Contains chlorine, thus the manufacturing process can release highly toxic dioxins into the environment.
 - Avoid #3 plastics for food and drink products, as toxins such as phthalates may be released into food. Risk is greatest if containers are worn, heated (including the microwave), or run through the dishwasher.
 - If cooking with PVC, avoid allowing plastic to touch the food.
 - Avoid burning PVC, as it will release toxins into the environment.

PS - Polystyrene

- **Found In:** Made into soft or rigid foams and hard plastics; disposable cups, plates and food trays, packing peanuts, egg cartons, carry-out containers
- **Recyclable?** Can be recycled through some curbside programs.
- **Recycled Into:** Insulation, egg cartons, rulers, foam packing, carry-out containers
- **Environmental & Health:** Generally considered to be environmentally unfriendly, evidence suggests that this type of plastic can release toxic by-products into foods, especially when heated.

Other/Miscellaneous

- Number 7 plastics encompass a wide variety of plastic resins that don't fit into the previous categories.
- **Found In:** 3- and 5-gallon water bottles, baby bottles, sunglasses, electronic casing, signs and displays, certain food containers, nylon
 - **Recyclable?** Traditionally not recyclable, some curbside programs now accept them.
 - **Recycled Into:** Plastic lumber, custom-made products
 - **Environmental & Health:** Studies have shown that the polycarbonate varieties can leach bisphenol A, a potential hormone disruptor, into liquids.