Common Questions About Recycling

1 What happens to recyclables after they are picked up at the curb or drop-off site? The recyclables are taken to a processing facility, separated and then baled for shipping to various manufacturers who use them to make new products. Both machinery and people sort items to maintain the quality of marketed materials. See the process in action at: recyclemorewisconsin.org/whtmr.html

2 Doesn't rinsing out my recyclable bottles, jars and cans before tossing them into the recycling bin waste more energy than is saved by recycling? Rinsing greatly reduces and prevents the "yuck" in recycling. Food residue attracts vermin, creates odors and is unpleasant for the sorters. Even though machines do much of the sorting, manual sorting is still necessary. Detailed studies show that the energy savings from recycling aluminum, glass, plastic and steel far outweigh any energy and water used in rinsing the containers.

3 Why doesn't my community recycling program collect all plastics? Markets for clean #1 and #2 plastics are consistently high, which is why they are always collected in community programs. Currently, there is not a consistent, reliable and cost-effective market for plastics #3 - 7. Because it is more difficult to accumulate and sell significant volumes of these materials, many recycling programs do not accept them. However, some communities have found local markets for #3 - 7 plastics and may accept them. Contact your community recycling program for recycling options in your area.

4 Can I recycle hard plastic from electronics packaging, food take-out containers or non-container household products like toys? Most recycling programs do not accept these materials because they vary in composition, are generally plastics #3 - 7 and unlike beverage bottles and milk jugs, there is little or no demand for them. Even if they are labeled as #1 or #2, these materials contain additives that prevent them from being recycled with other plastics. Packaging material in particular can get stuck in some of the machinery that is used to sort recyclables. Before recycling these plastics, check with your local recycling program.

5 Why should I remove plastic milk jug and bottle caps and container lids before recycling? Caps and lids are often made of different resins (#3 - 7 plastics) and become a contaminant when mixed with containers. In addition, caps and lids keep liquids and other contents in the bottle, which can make it difficult for machinery to properly sort the containers.

6 Can I recycle pizza boxes? In most programs, if cardboard pizza boxes have grease stains on the bottom, you can tear off the clean top and sides and recycle them with your other recyclable cardboard. The greasy bottom should be disposed of in the trash. If the top has cheese or other toppings stuck to it, the whole box is considered contaminated and should be thrown in the trash.

7 If plastic shopping bags are recyclable, why doesn't my curbside program take them? Plastic bags tangle up the machinery that community programs use to sort bottles, cans and paper items collected in curbside programs. However, many retail, grocery and service stores provide special bins for recycling plastic bags. These collected bags are handled using machinery designed for that purpose. Clean plastic bags have a high recycling value and are used to make plastic lumber and other products.

8 Why and how should I recycle a computer, television or other electronics? Each year 5 - 7 million computers, televisions and other electronics become obsolete in the United States. Electronics contain lead, mercury, cadmium, flame retardants and other harmful materials. If electronics are not properly recycled, these pollutants can leak out and enter groundwater or air, posing a threat to human and environmental health. Electronics also contain many valuable materials, including gold, copper and steel. There are a growing number of places to recycle electronics in Wisconsin. To learn more, visit dnr.wi.gov/ecyclewisconsin

9 Are compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) worth the extra effort and initial cost? Why should I recycle CFLs? CFLs require much less electricity to run, last longer than standard light bulbs and cut down on the mercury emissions from burning coal in power plants. It is important to dispose of CFLs correctly. When CFLs are landfilled the glass breaks and releases mercury, either into the atmosphere as landfill gas or as leachate, the liquid that seeps to the bottom of the landfill. Power plant emission reductions outweigh the amount of mercury that might be released from landfilled CFLs. There are several recycling options for CFLs. To learn more, visit Focus on Energy at focusonenergy.com/Residential/Lighting/cfls.aspx

10 What can I do with other materials that my community program does not collect for recycling? Recycling is just one option out of many for managing unwanted materials. Other options include donating gently used toys, clothes and household items; composting food scraps and yard materials; selectively shopping and purchasing products that use less packaging or use recycled packaging. For more ideas and information on reducing your waste, visit recyclemorewisconsin.org

What should be recycled in Wisconsin?

- Plastic containers #1 and # 2, including milk jugs and detergent, soda and water bottles
- Magazines, catalogs and other materials printed on similar paper
- Newspaper and office paper
- Corrugated cardboard
- Major appliances, including air conditioners, clothes washers and dryers, dishwashers, refrigerators, freezers, stoves, ovens, dehumidifiers, furnaces, boilers and water heaters
- Yard waste, including grass clippings, leaves, yard and garden debris
- Lead acid vehicle batteries, used automotive oils and used tires
- Computers, televisions, desktop printers, computer peripherals, DVD players, VCRs, digital video recorders, fax machines, phones with video displays (as of 9/1/2010)
- Oil absorbents over one gallon and used oil filters (as of 1/1/2011)

Recycling is enforced by banning a material from disposal at all Wisconsin landfills. Some communities go above and beyond what is required by law. Check with your local government or recycling center to find out what additional materials are accepted for recycling. For an updated list of materials banned from Wisconsin landfills, visit: dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/recycle/banned.html.

Who is required to recycle in Wisconsin?

Everyone, everywhere, all the time!
Wisconsin's recycling requirements apply to everyone in the state, at all locations. This includes schools, public places, businesses, special events, homes and apartments.

Puzzled By Plastics?

People are sometimes puzzled about which plastics can be recycled and which should go in the trash. And for good reason! Plastics are a group of very chemically diverse materials. Fortunately, a national coding system requires most consumer plastics to be labeled with a resin code 1 through 7. This helps consumers identify the types of plastic used in making bottles and other containers.

The resin coding system consists of a recycling triangle with a number 1 through 7 in the center. Numbers 1 through 6 each represent a different type of plastic resin. Number 7 includes all other plastics. The letters sometimes found under the triangle abbreviate the name of the plastic.

Generally, this coding symbol is imprinted on the bottom of a plastic container. While the code provides guidance, it should be viewed with caution because of the misleading use of the recycling triangle. **The presence of the recycling triangle does *not* necessarily mean that the item is accepted in your local program or that it can be recycled.** For example, plastic deli and produce containers often bear the #1 label. However, these containers include additives that will ruin a batch of #1 plastic used to make new beverage containers. When in doubt, it is better to throw the container out.

1 PET

#1 PETE - polyethylene terephthalate
Common forms: bottles for soft drinks, water, juice, sports drinks, mouthwash, ketchup and salad dressing; food jars for peanut butter, jelly, jam and pickles
Recycled into: fiber for carpet, fleece jackets, comforter fill and tote bags
Good recycling market

2 HDPE

#2 HDPE - high density polyethylene
Common forms: bottles for milk, water, juice, cosmetics, shampoo, dish and laundry detergents and household cleaners
Recycled into: plastic lumber for outdoor decking, fencing and picnic tables; piping; floor tiles; buckets; crates; flower pots; garden edging; recycling bins; bottles for non-food items, such as shampoo, conditioner, liquid laundry detergent, household cleaners, motor oil and antifreeze
Good recycling market

3 PVC

#3 PVC - polyvinyl chloride
Common forms: rigid packaging like blister packs and clamshells, bags for bedding and medical supplies, shrink wrap, deli and meat wrap and tamper-resistant packaging
Recycled into: pipe, decking, fencing, paneling, gutters, carpet backing, floor tiles and mats, resilient flooring and mud flaps, cassette trays, traffic cones, garden hose
Limited recycling market; a serious contaminant in current recycling systems

4 LDPE

#4 LDPE - low density polyethylene
Common forms: bags for dry cleaning, newspapers, bread, frozen foods, fresh produce and household garbage; shrink wrap and flexible film; container lids; squeezable bottles like honey and mustard; toys
Recycled into: shipping envelopes, garbage can liners, floor tile, paneling, furniture film and sheeting, compost bins, trash cans, landscape timber and outdoor lumber
Limited but growing recycling market

5 PP

#5 PP - polypropylene
Common forms: containers for yogurt, margarine, butter, dairy products, takeout meals and deli foods; medicine bottles, bottle caps and closures
Recycled into: automobile applications, garden rakes, storage bins, shipping pallets, sheeting and trays
Limited but growing recycling market

6 PS

#6 PS - polystyrene foam – Styrofoam™
Common forms: food service items such as cups, plates, bowls, cutlery, hinged takeout containers (clamshells) and meat and poultry trays; packing peanuts; compact disc cases; aspirin bottles; protective foam packaging for furniture, electronics and other delicate items
Recycled into: thermal insulation, thermometers, light switch plates, vents, desk trays, rulers, license plate frames and egg cartons
Limited recycling market

7 OTHER

#7 Other
This category includes products which contain all other plastics, mixed plastics or multi-layer materials.
Limited recycling market

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Who knew three arrows would change the direction of society?