

Know Your Plastics

Many plastic products are stamped with the recycle symbol and a number from 1 to 7. Some products have no recycle symbol but are usually recyclable. Salt Lake City curbside recycling and the NHMU recycling service accept plastics 1 thru 7. All clean plastic is recyclable except compostable or biodegradable plastics. These are fairly new and rather rare, and are mostly used for fast-food forks and spoons and cups. If in doubt, recycle it!

The seven common plastics are:

1-Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET, PETE) This is the clear, tough material that most water and beverage bottles are made of. It is also used for food jars for peanut butter, jam and pickles. There is a high demand for this plastic. It is recycled into fiber for carpet and polyester fiberfill.

2- High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) This is a translucent plastic used for milk jugs, shampoo and soap bottles, and grocery bags. It is recycled into bottles for non-food items, plastic lumber for decking and miscellaneous products such as pipe, buckets and flower pots.

3- Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC, Vinyl) This is a strong plastic used primarily in building materials such as pipe, window frames, siding and fencing. It is also used in packaging such as blister packs and clamshells. It is recycled into many of these products again, as well as electrical boxes, traffic cones and garden hose.

4-Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE) This is a tough and flexible plastic made mainly into thin films. Garbage bags, bread bags, shrink wrap and stretch film, also squeezable bottles for mustard, etc are made of LDPE. When foamed, it makes rigid panels used for padding and shipping. It is recycled into shipping envelopes, trash cans and outdoor lumber.

5- Polypropylene (PP) This plastic is strong, has a high resistance to chemicals and a high melting point. It is used for large molded parts for automobiles and consumer products such as storage tubs, brooms and brushes, bottles and caps and containers for yogurt, margarine and other foods. It is recycled back into these same products.

6- Polystyrene (PS) This is a versatile plastic that is hard and brittle. Used for CD cases and aspirin bottles, plastic cutlery, plates and cups. It is made into Styrofoam, which is used in packing peanuts, egg cartons and custom packing products for furniture and electronics. PS is recycled back into these same products.

7- Other. Use of this code indicates that a package is made with a resin other than the six listed above, or is made of more than one resin. Common products are three and five-gallon water bottles, some citrus juice and catsup bottles, oven-baking bags and custom packaging. These recycle into bottles and plastic lumber.

Plastics take up to 1,000 years to degrade in a landfill.

Recycling plastic takes 88% less energy than making plastic from raw materials.

Enough plastic is thrown away each year to circle the Earth four times

Americans throw away 35 billion plastic bottles every year.

Only about 25% of the plastic produced in the U.S. is recycled.