Fact Sheet

Plastic

Manufacturing plastics from recycled materials saves 70% of the energy required to make virgin plastic product from fossil fuels.

Recycling plastic

All plastic is potentially recyclable, however, due to complex collection, sorting and cleaning processes, only certain plastic bottles and containers are currently accepted for recycling at your local Material Recovery Facility (MRF). Whether a type of plastic can be recycled in your area depends on its Plastic Identification Code. To help identify different plastics, manufacturers stamp a Plastic Identification Code on their products. This code is a number inside a triangle with chasing arrows, and is usually found on the bottom of the products, stamped on the plastic itself.

At present plastic bottles and containers with the numbers 1, 2 and 5 are the most commonly recycled plastics, and include items such as milk and soft drink bottles and ice-cream containers. However, recycling technology is improving all the time, and some local Councils are beginning to recycle other plastics, such as 3, 4, 6 and 7. Check with your local Council, or look at the sticker on your recycling bin, to find out which plastic bottles and containers you can recycle.

Once plastic bottles and containers are collected from your recycling bin, they are sent to the MRF for sorting and baling. The various types of plastics must be sorted individually, in most instances. The bales are purchased by plastic manufacturers and transported to recycling plants.

At the recycling plant the plastics are shredded, chopped or ground into small pieces. The pieces are washed to remove labels and left over contents. During the washing process, the various types of shredded plastic will separate according to their densities.

These plastics can usually be recycled:

Some Councils also accept these:

Did you know...?

Australia produces more than 1.5 million tonnes of plastics every year, which is more than 71kg per person. This includes:

- *50,000 tonnes of soft drink bottles*
- *30,000 tonnes of milk bottles*
- *10,000 tonnes of detergent and shampoo bottles*

The rest is made up of shrink-wrap, film, shopping bags and other types of plastics. Australians used 3.9 billion plastic bags in 2007. If they were tied together, they would circle the globe 24 times.

Australians recycled more than 282,000 tonnes of plastic in 2008 – three times more than the 94,000 tonnes recycled in 2007.

It takes less energy to manufacture a plastic sauce bottle than a glass sauce bottle. And because plastics are lightweight it takes less energy to transport them.

Recycling one tonne of plastics saves enough energy to run a refrigerator for a month.

It only takes 125 recycled plastic milk bottles to manufacture one 120-litre wheelie bin from recycled plastic.

The energy saved recycling one plastic bottle can power a computer for 25 minutes.

Source: PACIA 2009 National Plastics Recycling Survey; Beverage Industry Environment Council; Department of Sustainability, Environment; Water, Population and Communities WasteWise WA; VISY Recycling; Clean Up

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Plastic - Continued

Plastic Identification Code	Name of plastic	Examples of plastic products	Characteristics	Examples of recycled plastic products
1	Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET/PETE)	Soft drink bottles, sleeping bag filling	Clear, rigid, often used as a fiber	Soft drink bottles, clear film for packaging
2	High Density Polyethylene (HDPE)	Milk bottles, crinkly shopping bags	Hard to semi flexible, usually opaque	Wheelie bins, detergent bottles, agricultural pipes
3	Unplasticised Polyvinyl Chloride (UPVC) Plasticised Polyvinyl Chloride (PPVC)	Cordial and juice bottles Shoe soles, garden hose	Flexible, clear and semi-elastic	Pipes, tiles Hose cores, industrial flooring
4	Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE)	Ice cream lids, garbage bags	Soft and flexible, waxy surface	Freezer bags, plastic packaging
5	Polypropylene (PP)	Ice cream containers, crisp packets	Flexible but strong	Compost bins, worm farms
6	Polystyrene (PS) Expanded Polystyrene (EPS)	Yogurt pots, plastic cutlery, hot drink cups, take-away containers	Rigid and brittle, clear or glassy-looking, lightweight and foam-like	Clothes pegs, coat hangers
7	All other plastics	Includes acrylic and nylon	Varies	Imitation timber and concrete products

Plastics Identification Code- De-coding Plastics

Plastics manufacturers stamp a Plastics Identification Code on their products to identify the type of plastic that the product is made from, not to indicate that the product can be recycled. Remember, only bottles and containers are recyclable.

Always look for the ID code when recycling plastics. Disregard all other numbers and codes included on plastic containers or labels as they are there for manufacturing purposes only. If it does not have a code, do not place it in the recycling bin. The table above will help you decode each of the different plastic types, their characteristics, uses and recycled uses.

Plastic recycling tips

- Check your bin sticker to see what plastics are accepted in your area or call your local Council
- Look out for the plastic identification code symbol on the bottom or side of the bottle or container
- Remove all lids and labels from bottles
- Rinse and squash bottles

What can/cannot be recycled in your kerbside recycling bin?

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To find out what plastics are recyclable in your local Council area you will need to refer to your recycling bin lid sticker or your fridge calendar to find out what plastic identification symbols are accepted, ie: 1 2 3

These symbols will be the ones that you will need to look for on the bottom of all plastic bottles, containers and other plastic packaging you will be throwing away.

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All other types of plastic not identified on your recycling bin sticker or fridge calendar, must not be put in the recycle bin. Items that have not been stamped with a plastic identification code symbol, and whose plastic type is unidentifiable are also unacceptable.

You also cannot recycle polystyrene foam or packaging foam.