

# Demystifying Plastic Recycling Numbers!!

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Posted on November 14, 2011



## What Do The Plastic Recycling Numbers???

According to the [EPA](#) “30 million tons of plastic waste was generated in 2009, representing 12.3 percent of total municipal solid waste stream a dramatic increase from 1960, when plastics were only 1 percent of the waste stream.” “The recycling rate for different types of plastic varies greatly, resulting in an overall plastics recycling rate of only 7 percent, or 2.1 million tons in 2009.” The multipurpose 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. Our addiction to this material will take decades to overcome but in the meantime we’re here to help you sort out the more recycling friendly plastics from the bad. There are seven numbers you’ll find on plastic containers, showing seven different types of plastics used on the market.

**Plastic #1:** This is polyethylene terephthalate, also known as PETE or PET. Most disposable soda and water bottles are made of #1 plastic, and it’s usually clear. This plastic is considered normally safe. However its surface allows bacteria and flavor to accumulate. It is best not to keep reusing these bottles reusable containers.

*Recycling:* Picked up through most curbside recycling programs still recycling rates remain low (around 20%), even though the material is in high demand by remanufacturers.

*Recycled into:* Polar fleece, fiber, tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling, straps, (occasionally) new containers

*Waste = Food:* Plastic bottles decomposes in 5000 years in ideal situations.

**Plastic #2:** This is high density polyethylene, or HDPE. Most milk jugs, some detergent bottles, juice bottles, butter tubs, and some toiletries bottles are made of this. It is usually opaque. This plastic is considered safe and has low risk of leaching.

*Recycling:* It is also picked up by most recycling programs. *Recycled into:* Laundry detergent bottles, oil bottles, pens, recycling containers, floor tile, drainage pipe, lumber, benches, doghouses, picnic tables, fencing

*Waste = Food:* Milk Jugs decompose in 1,000,000 years

**Plastic #3:** This is polyvinyl chloride, or PVC. PVC is used to make plumbing pipes, cooling oil bottles, loose-leaf binders and food wrap. It is not considered safe to cook food near it. There are phthalates in this plastic, which is a softening chemical that hinders hormonal development. You should never use #3 plastic around food.

*Recycling:* #3 plastic is rarely accepted by recycling programs. It's best to avoid this material until a recycling program is created.

**Plastic #4:** This is low density polyethylene (LDPE). It is used to make grocery bags, some food wraps, squeezable bottles, Dry cleaning bags and bread bags. This plastic is considered safe.

*Recycling:* You can recycle your grocery bags at your grocery store. Better yet bring your own Recycled into: Trash can liners and cans, compost bins, shipping envelopes, paneling, lumber, landscaping ties, floor tile

**Plastic #5:** this is polypropylene. It's used to create yogurt cups and water bottles with a milky finish, medicine bottles, ketchup and syrup bottles, and straws. This plastic is also considered safe.

*Recycling:* Wholefoods stores have #5 recycling bins, it's also increasingly being accepted by curbside recycling programs.

**Plastic #6:** this is polystyrene, or Styrofoam. You'll also find it in compact disc jackets, grocery store meat trays, egg cartons, aspirin bottles, foam packaging peanuts and plastic tableware. Evidence is increasingly suggesting that this type of plastic leaches potentially toxic chemicals, especially when heated. Avoiding the use of #6 plastic as much as possible.

*Recycling:* It is difficult to recycle. Just don't use it.

*Waste = Food in:* Decomposes in 1,000,000 + years.

**Plastic #7:** This number basically means "everything else." It's used 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 curbside programs now take them.

*Recycled into:* Plastic lumber, custom-made products