

Decoding Plastic Codes

Solid Waste Management Fact Sheet No. 17

Have you been wondering about the numbers that appear on the bottom of products you buy that are packaged in plastic containers? The numbers are the result of the plastic industry's effort to make the identification and separating of plastics easier for consumers and recyclers. Most uses of recycled plastics do not allow mixing of the various types.

The numbers, which are enclosed by three solid arrows that form a triangle, indicate the type of plastic used to make the container. The seven types of plastics are described below.

1 = PET or PETE = Polyethylene Teraphthalate

Common uses: soft drink bottles, some fruit juices, alcohol beverage bottles.

2 = HDPE = High density polyethylene

Common uses: (clear HDPE) milk jugs, distilled water, large vinegar bottles, grocery bags; (colored HDPE) liquid laundry and dish detergent, fabric softener, motor oil, antifreeze, bleach and lotion.

3 = V = Vinyl/Polyvinyl Chloride

Common uses: vegetable oil bottles, mouthwash, salad dressings.

4 = LDPE = Low density polyethylene

Common uses: bags for dry cleaning, bread, produce and trash and for food storage containers.

5 = PP = Polypropylene

Common uses: battery cases, dairy tubs, cereal box liners.

6 = PS = Polystyrene

Common uses: yogurt cups, clear carryout containers,

vitamin bottles, fast food, spoons, knives and forks, hot cups, meat and produce trays, egg cartons, clamshell carryout food containers.

7 = Other types of plastics

Plastics labeled with a seven (7) are made from a type other than the six most common types listed above or they can be made from multiple layers of different types of plastics.

Common uses: squeezable ketchup bottles, most chip snack bags, juice boxes (individual servings).

While the coding system makes it easier to sort the different types of plastics for recycling, most communities that accept plastics in their recycling program collect only PETE (1) in the form of plastic soda bottles and HDPE (2) in the form of milk jugs.

Adapted from: Cathy F. Bowen, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Agricultural and Extension Education, Family Public Policy and Consumer Issues, Penn State University, April 6, 1994

Prepared by
William M. Eberle
Extension Specialist, Land Resources



Cooperative Extension Service
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

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