

Recycling 102: Recycling beyond the Township Ordinance

By Zach Barner, Planning & Zoning Coordinator

The Township Solid Waste ordinance (Chapter 168) lists the basic materials that residents and businesses **must** recycle - but the list of materials that residents **may** recycle goes beyond those items. Remember, each hauler has restrictions on what they do and do not collect. **Please contact your local hauler to obtain a list of accepted materials.**

Plastics

Confused about which plastics you *can* and *cannot* recycle? With so many different types of plastics, the task of knowing which ones to recycle may seem challenging. Here is a simple explanation of the different types of plastics that you may be able to recycle.

The well-recognized “chasing arrows” (triangle) symbol we see on plastic containers and products does not *necessarily* mean the product is recyclable. The little number (1-7) inside the triangle tells the real story. The purpose of the number is to identify which type of plastic was used to create the product. Not all plastics are recyclable or even reusable – there are numerous plastic-based products that cannot break down naturally and cannot be easily recycled. ***Below are the seven standard classifications for plastics, along with the recycling and reuse information for each type:***

#1 Plastic (PET or Polyethylene Terephthalate) is used for many of the items found in our refrigerators and pantries. Examples include soft drink/water bottles, peanut butter jars, liquor bottles, and certain types of packaging. Type 1 plastics are intended for single use applications. Repeated use increases the risk of chemical leaching and bacterial growth. During the recycling process, the plastic is crushed and shredded into small flakes. These flakes are then reprocessed to make new PET products. The material can also be spun into polyester fiber, which is used to make textiles such as fleece garments, carpets, stuffing for pillows, and life jackets, among other things.

#2 Plastic (HDPE or High-Density Polyethylene) is used to make milk jugs, juice bottles, bleach/detergent/household cleaner bottles, and motor oil/antifreeze containers. Some haulers may only allow narrow-necked bottles, while others may only collect clear or colored #2 Plastics. HDPE plastic is a hearty material and does not break down under exposure to sunlight or extreme temperatures. As a result, recycled HDPE is used to make plastic lumber products, picnic tables/benches, waste bins, bed liners for trucks, and other products that require durability and weather-resistance.

#3 Plastic (PVC or Polyvinyl Chloride) is used to make the bottles for cooking oil, salad dressing, and floor polish; toys for children and pets; and even bubble wrap. It can also be



commonly found in products like siding and piping. Like HDPE, PVC is often used in outdoor/garden applications due to its resistance to sunlight and temperatures. Products made using PVC plastic are not recyclable and the applications for reuse are limited.

#4 Plastic (LDPE or Low-Density Polyethylene) is used to make various types of film/wrap products, flexible lids/bottles that you can squeeze, and various types of household bags (including grocery, garbage, and bread bags). Many LDPE products are reusable, but not recyclable.

#5 Plastic (PP or Polypropylene) is strong and lightweight. It is popular for use in things like yogurt containers, shampoo bottles, and margarine tubs. Polypropylene is also used in cereal box liners, combs, and battery packaging. Recycled PP is used to make landscaping border stripping, battery cases, brooms, bins and trays. Recycling rates of PP are relatively low, but on the rise.

#6 Plastic (PS or Polystyrene) is a cheap, malleable material used to make many disposable (“Styrofoam”) plates and cups. It can also be used to make cartons for eggs, meat trays, take out boxes for food, packing peanuts, and insulation. Recycling of Polystyrene is not widely available, and many curbside haulers will not accept these products. Additionally, PS is structurally weak and can break down relatively easily, causing chemicals to leach. This combined with its light weight and sheer volume make PS, in particular, a notable threat to wildlife and natural ecosystems. Polystyrene should be avoided where possible.

#7 Plastic (Other – BPA, Polycarbonate, LEXAN, etc.) is a catch-all category for which reuse and recycling protocols are not standardized. Oftentimes, #7 plastics are a combination types 1-6. Examples include large water bottles (3-5 gallons) and items like sunglasses, DVDs, and phone cases.

For more information, you can visit the Chester County Solid Waste Authority website at www.chestercountyswa.org.