Plastics Recycling Terminology: Solving Consumer Confusion

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Moore Recycling Associates
NYSAR3 Conference
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Plastics Recycling Terms & Tools
Take the ambiguity out of plastics recycling. Clear, consistent recycling terminology can help your community (and the nation) recycle more plastics.


Hey, recycling pros! Do you speak plastics?

recycle your plastics
People are confused and overwhelmed.

Plastics 1-7: Can I recycle everything plastic?!?

I don’t get it, so forget it!

OR: I’m not sure, but I’ll put it in anyway.

Need meaningful terms that effectively communicate what goes in the bin.

But, what about these?
“I continue to have problems deciding what plastic items are recyclable”

“Maybe send out more info on the exact type of plastics that can be recycled”

“Styrofoam isn’t recyclable, however egg cartons have a recycle symbol?”

“The Coke [incentive program] promotion and my Mother-in-Law confused me about plastics #3-7.”

Source: City of Greensboro, NC recycling survey
Industry Advisory Group

- Tamsin Ettefagh, Envision Plastics
- Kate Eagles, NAPCOR
- Jon Stephens, Avangard Innovative
- Kurt Humes and Rebecca Jewel, Waste Management
- Steve Thompson, Recycling Partnership
- Pete Adrian, Lake County, IL
- Diana Gentilcore, EPS Industry Alliance
- Michael Westerfield, DART
- Liz Bedard, APR
- Kenny Luong, Ming’s Recycling Corp

*now Recycling Partnership
A Solution: The Terms and Tools

**Goal:** Increase the quality and quantity of plastics collected and to facilitate better tracking.

**Outreach Terms:** Common terminology and simple tools for community recycling programs in the US and Canada communicate more effectively to residents about plastic recycling.

**Commodity Terms:** Streamline communications about buying and selling plastics that have been collected in the plastics value chain.
Outreach Terms Tool

4 easy steps to build your Program

RecycleYourPlastics.org
“We opted for the new terms and to move away from the numbering system after [we found] students [who] had grown up with the mandatory recycling program, either could not remember the plastic #’s that were allowable in all Wisconsin programs or they didn’t even know there were numbers on plastic packaging.

So now, when I talk to people, I only need to explain to them that we accept “all plastic bottles and containers.”

Chris Miller, Recycling Coordinator
Step 1: Main Program Categories

Select the **Main Program Category** that best describes the plastics you will accept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Plastic Bottles &amp; Jars</td>
<td>- Plastic PET (1) Bottles &amp; Jars&lt;br&gt;- Plastic HDPE (2) Bottles &amp; Jars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Plastic Bottles &amp; Containers</td>
<td>- Plastic PET (1) Bottles &amp; Jars&lt;br&gt;- Plastic HDPE (2) Bottles &amp; Jars&lt;br&gt;- Plastic PET (1) Containers &amp; Lids&lt;br&gt;- Plastic HDPE (2) Containers &amp; Lids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic Beverage Bottles</td>
<td>- Plastic Soda, Water &amp; Other Drink Bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic Bottles &amp; Jars</td>
<td>- Plastic Soda, Water &amp; Other Drink Bottles&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Food &amp; Household Bottles/Jars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic Bottles &amp; Containers</td>
<td>- Plastic Soda, Water &amp; Other Drink Bottles&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Food &amp; Household Bottles/Jars&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Tubs &amp; Lids&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Produce, Deli &amp; Bakery Containers, Cups, Trays&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Non-food Containers &amp; Packaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid Plastic</td>
<td>- Plastic Soda, Water &amp; Other Drink Bottles&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Food &amp; Household Bottles/Jars&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Tubs &amp; Lids&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Produce, Deli &amp; Bakery Containers, Cups, Trays&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Non-food Containers &amp; Packaging&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Bulky Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic</td>
<td>- Plastic Soda, Water &amp; Other Drink Bottles&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Food &amp; Household Bottles/Jars&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Tubs &amp; Lids&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Produce, Deli &amp; Bakery Containers, Cups, Trays&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Non-food Containers &amp; Packaging&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Bulky Items&lt;br&gt;- Plastic Bags, Wraps &amp; Film (bag in bag)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 2: Additions

Additions can be added to one of the seven Main Categories OR can be used as individual selections, if the Categories don’t fit your program.
How Terms are Defined

Categories from the first two steps are defined for easy usage.

**Plastic Soda, Water & Other Drink Bottles**
Soda, water, juice and other beverages – Commonly marked: PET (1), HDPE (2), PP (5), Other (7)

**Plastic Food & Household Bottles/Jars**
Screw top bottles/jars - For Example: Food: ketchup, peanut butter, mayonnaise, mustard, Household: laundry detergent, shampoo, and cleaning products – Commonly marked: PET (1), HDPE (2), LDPE (4), PP (5), Other (7)

**Plastic Tubs**
Tub containers, such as: yogurt, margarine, ice cream tubs, coffee containers: Commonly marked: HDPE (2), LDPE (4), PP (5)

**Plastic Tubs & Lids**
Tub containers and lids for items such as: yogurt, margarine, ice cream tubs, coffee containers – Commonly marked: HDPE (2), LDPE (4), PP (5)

**Plastic Produce, Deli & Bakery Containers, Cups, Trays**
Take-out, deli, bakery, berries/produce containers, cookie trays, cake domes, party cups, clear egg cartons – Commonly marked: PET (1), PP (5), PS (6), Other (7)

**Plastic Non-food Containers & Packaging**
Containers and packaging for non-food items such as: flower pots, small storage containers like tupperware, CD/DVD cases, clear formed plastic packaging around products like toys or hardware and electronics (paper components should be removed) – Commonly marked: PET (1), HDPE (2), LDPE (4), PP (5), PS (6), Other (7)

**Plastic Bulky Items**
Items as large as or larger than a 5 gallon bucket, such as: drums, large water bottles, crates, large storage bins, baskets, totes and lawn furniture – some may be marked: PET (1), HDPE (2), LDPE (4), PP (5), Other (7)

**Plastic Toys**
Plastic Toys without metal or electronic components. For Example: Slides, play kitchen, sand bucket and shovel, flying disk, bat & ball

**Plastic Buckets**
5 gallon buckets, kitty litter buckets – Commonly marked: HDPE (2), PP (5)

**Plastic Flower Pots**
Rigid flower pots. 4 inches or larger – Commonly marked: HDPE (2), PP (5)

**Plastic PET (1) Bottles & Jars**
Screw top bottles/jars that are marked PET (1) - For Example: Beverage - soda, juice, water and other beverages, Food - ketchup, peanut butter, mayonnaise, mustard, Household - shampoo, cleaning products

**Plastic PET (1) Containers & Lids**
Take-out and other containers, lids, cake domes and trays used to package items such as fresh produce, baked goods, nuts, and deli items; and clear cups that are marked PET (1)
Step 3: Exclusions

Only include the most important **Exclusions**. Too much information may leave your residents feeling overwhelmed and they won’t pay attention to the important details.

- **No Containers that held Hazardous Products**
- **No Motor Oil Bottles/Containers**
- **No Products that are Compostable** (e.g., PLA)
- **No Products that Contain Bio- or Oxi-Degradable Additives**
- **No Microwavable Containers**
- **No Bags, Wrap or Film Plastic**
- **No Frozen Food Bags**
- **No Other Film**
- **No Foam**
- **No Foam Food Service: cups, plates, take-out containers**
- **No Foam Blocks/Shapes**
- **No Foam Peanuts**
- **No Thin Foamed Sheets/Wrap** (used around products like electronics)
- **No Flower Pots**
- **No Buckets**
- **No clamshells or trays from produce, deli, bakery, take-out**
- **No Cups**
- **No Straws**
- **No Caps**
- **No Lids**
- **No Toys**
- **No Toys with Metal or Electronic Components**
- **No Blister Packs** (clear formed packaging around products like toys, hardware and electronics)
- **No Black Plastic**
- **No Plastic marked PVC (3)**
- **No Plastic marked PS (6)**
- **No Plastic marked Other (7)**
- **No Electronics/Appliances**
- **No Food Contaminated Containers**
- **No Pouches** (stand up bags or squeeze pouches for items such as ground coffee, juice, dried fruit, yogurt, laundry, oil)
Step 4: Notes/Instructions & Finish

Add Notes at the end of your program list to provide clear, additional directions.

You’re Done!
Now, either create a Program Flyer OR use the Royalty-Free Images to create your own in-house flyer.
Create Your Own Flyer

• Pulls in
  – Program selections
  – Image selections

• Add
  – Logo
  – Community info
  – Contact info

PLEASE RECYCLE:
Plastic Bottles & Containers
- Plastic Soda, Water & Other Drink Bottles
- Plastic Food & Household Bottles/Jars
- Plastic Tub and Lids
- Plastic Produce, Deli & Bakery Containers, Cups, Trays
- Plastic Non-food Containers & Packaging

Plastic Buckets

OH AND BY THE WAY...
* Empty, flatten and put caps back on bottles/jars
* Rinse or wipe clean all food or other residue from bottles & containers

EXCLUSIONS:
No Containers that held Hazardous Products
No Bags, Wrap or Film Plastic
No Foam

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Image Gallery

- Royalty-free
- Acceptable items and exclusions
- Provided in JPEG, TIFF, and EPS
- EPS allows for easy layering

Images provided by:

Association canadienne de l’industrie des plastiques
since 1943
Canadian Plastics Industry Association

Thank you!
"We were using numbers, but when we switched to roll carts we saw an increase in contamination. When I give presentations to groups, I am more likely to use descriptive terms when explaining what can be recycled.

From the feedback from the MRF, it seems quality is steady. Quantity is steadily increasing. Overall, our residents are extremely happy with our education program. They say they understand better what recycling is and isn’t. Pictures paired with terms are the most helpful."

Samantha Yager, Recycling Coordinator
Greensboro, NC: Data Supports Message Overhaul

- Objective: Recycling Rebrand
- Challenges:
  - High contamination
  - Varied socioeconomic groups
  - Problems with existing SS program

*image courtesy of City of Greensboro*
Process

• Created survey
• Printed and sent 90,000 copies via water bill
• Received responses by:
  – Direct mail
  – Returned with water bill payment
  – Online submissions
• Compiled data
• Made program changes

*images courtesy of City of Greensboro
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Percent Correct</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardboard</td>
<td>95.56%</td>
<td>95.56%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass Bottles</td>
<td>94.60%</td>
<td>94.60%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspaper, Magazines, Catalogs</td>
<td>94.54%</td>
<td>94.54%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aluminum Cans</td>
<td>93.23%</td>
<td>93.23%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipboard (Cereal Boxes, etc)</td>
<td>86.57%</td>
<td>86.57%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office and School Paper, Junk Mail</td>
<td>80.61%</td>
<td>80.61%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steel/ Tin Cans</td>
<td>78.61%</td>
<td>78.61%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk &amp; Juice Cartons</td>
<td>75.23%</td>
<td>75.23%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastics #3-7</td>
<td>72.73%</td>
<td>72.73%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastics #1-2</td>
<td>63.59%</td>
<td>63.59%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pizza Boxes</td>
<td>59.94%</td>
<td>59.94%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluminum Foil &amp; Pie Pans</td>
<td>52.93%</td>
<td>52.93%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerosol Cans (empty)</td>
<td>45.41%</td>
<td>45.41%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic Bags</td>
<td>26.11%</td>
<td>73.89%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Towels, Tissues</td>
<td>25.02%</td>
<td>74.98%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Styrofoam</td>
<td>20.23%</td>
<td>79.77%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empty Motor Oil Bottles</td>
<td>8.92%</td>
<td>91.08%</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yard Waste</td>
<td>4.39%</td>
<td>95.61%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tires, Rubber</td>
<td>3.54%</td>
<td>96.46%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>3.12%</td>
<td>96.88%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Waste</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
<td>98.74%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
<td><strong>81.00%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Guide: Plastics Messaging

- “Plastic” Header
- All Bottles - “Top On” note
- All Containers
- All Jugs
- Large Plastic Items
- “NO” Items - Bags, Sheets, Styrofoam, Hoses

*image courtesy of City of Greensboro
Commodity Terms: Communications with MRFs and Markets

- **Products**
- **Municipality**
  - Trying to divert material
- **Consumer**
  - Put in the bin
- **MRF**
  - Sorting to market
- **Markets**
  - Recycling into a useable raw material

**Communicating WHAT IS IN THE BALE**

- **What am I buying?**
- **What are we diverting?**

**Better Tracking More Understanding More Value**
Commodity Terms: Room for Improvement?

What kind of bale is it, really?

Does the Mixed Rigid Bale include bulky?

Does 1-7 really mean *all plastics*?

Does 3-7 contain PET or HDPE *non-bottle containers*?

*There will always be nuances, but we can do better.*
Better Tracking: Critical Plastics Data

Availability of Recycling (PP Tubs & Containers)  Bale Audits & MRF Studies

Plastics Recycling Terms & Tools
Better Communication... Better Recycling
Find and USE the Terms & Tools

www.RecycleYourPlastics.org/termsandtools

www.RecycleYourPlastics.org/commodityterms

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbcVQ2_8UU4
Join Us: Use The Terms!
THANK YOU!
Questions?

Please contact me for more information.

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