

PLASTIC



by numbers

PLASTICS BY THE NUMBERS

If you look at most plastic packaging, you'll often see a number (#1 to #7) in the middle of triangular arrows; that's a resin code, and it tells us what type of plastic it is. Contrary to popular belief, this resin code is not a recycling symbol and doesn't mean the item is recyclable.



#1 (PETE/PET)

A bit about it

Polyethylene terephthalate is often a firm plastic that's used for single-use items such as water bottles.

Recycling

It's relatively easy to recycle.

Health

It is thought to leach a suspected carcinogen called antimony, especially at high temperatures.



#2 (HDPE)

A bit about it

High-density polyethylene is typically a hard plastic (such as for medicine bottles, milk jugs, or detergent bottles) but other times is a bag, such as cereal box liners.

Recycling

Generally, firm #2 plastics are easily recycled, but box liners are less recyclable.

Health

Compared to other plastics, it is considered a safer option.



#3 (PVC)

A bit about it

Polyvinyl chloride is very challenging to identify, as it can be found in a variety of consumer goods and is often not labelled. It can be found in some, but not all, soft plastics such as shower curtains, rain gear, cling wrap, school supplies, and children's toys, as well as pipes.

Recycling

Technically recyclable, but very rarely accepted except at specialty locations.

Health

PVC can leach numerous chemicals, including chlorine and phthalates (which are known reproductive toxins). Its manufacturing also releases harmful chemicals.



#4 (LDPE)

A bit about it

Low-density polyethylene is sometimes a hard plastic, but is known for being the quintessential grocery bag.

Recycling

Technically recyclable, but notoriously challenging, as it tends to get caught in sorting equipment and cause safety issues. Plastic bags are also considered a cheap material with little value and too much contamination, meaning that they're often shipped abroad to countries such as Malaysia, which are now pushing back and refusing our plastic garbage. Plastic bags are not often accepted in curbside pick-up recycling programs.

Health

Compared to other plastics, it is considered a safer option.

WASTE SORTING





#5 (PP)

A bit about it

Polypropylene is typically a hard plastic used for things such as yogurt tubs and food storage containers.

Recycling

Generally, #5 plastics are widely recyclable.

Health

Compared to other plastics, it is considered a safer option.



#6 (PS)

A bit about it

Polystyrene is often known as Styrofoam or foam. This lightweight material is used as packing material, takeout containers, some disposable cups, egg cartons, meat trays, and even yogurt containers. (Note that it doesn't always look like foam.)

Recycling

Technically recyclable, but not always accepted except at specialty locations, where it may be densified to press out the air that makes polystyrene foam bulky to ship to processors.

Health

It has been shown to leach styrene and other toxins.



#7 (OTHER)

A bit about it

This category is a catch-all, so it includes all plastics not previously mentioned (including polycarbonate plastic—BPA).

Recycling

Technically recyclable, but very rarely accepted except at specialty locations.

Health

Since this is a catch-all category, it's nearly impossible to say.

