

## Why is plastic recycling so confusing?

Recycling is a system. Recyclable wastes go into the system, are processed into a marketable material, and are shipped to market for reuse. Recyclable wastes have to be prepared to enter the system; they need to be sorted and collected, contamination (i.e. non-recyclable items) has to be removed, and the recyclables need to be containerized for the processing facility. Processing facilities further sort the recyclables: changing the physical properties of the materials, such as reducing plastics to pellets, and or containerizing the material for market. At the end of the process, a market for the material has to exist, otherwise, recycling is not economically viable and the whole system falls apart.

Product packaging comprises a significant portion of the recycling stream. However, companies that make consumer goods are primarily concerned with safely getting a product from point A to point B; the actual recyclability of the packaging is a secondary concern. This is evident in the wide variety of plastics used in modern packaging. If you look on the bottom of most plastic bottles or containers, you'll see a "chasing arrows" symbol with a number. Although you might assume that this means the item is recyclable, this is not always the case.

The #1-#7 plastics numbering system located inside the chasing arrows **only** indicates the type of resin used to make the plastic item, but it does not guarantee that there are recycling systems in your area that can process that type of plastic or packaging. Recyclability of most materials is subject to whether local infrastructure is capable of handling them, and whether there are reliable resale markets for the material. This can vary regionally.

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