



SHOULD WE EVEN BOTHER RECYCLING PLASTICS?

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BY EVIE ALEXANDER

Recycling plastic seems like a no-brainer, but unbeknownst to the general public, there's more to the chemistry of plastic than meets the eye. Though we talk about plastic as if it is the same molecule, there are actually 7 categories of plastics, each with its own unique molecular properties. Some are relatively easy to recycle, others are hard to recycle while others are not at all recyclable. Oh, and just to add one more twist to the plastic saga, recyclable plastic can only be recycled a limited number of times.

Categories of Plastic

1. Polyethylene terephthalate (PET)
Example: plastic water bottles (just the bottle, not the cap)
2. High Density Polyethylene (HDPE)
Example: Rigid plastic like large tupperware/storage container
3. Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)
Example: Pipes. Too toxic to store food products
4. Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE)
Example: Soft, flexible rubber-like plastic containers like squeeze bottles
5. Polypropylene (PP)
Example: Water bottle caps
6. Polystyrene (PS)
Example: Styrofoam
7. Other
Example: Anything that doesn't fall under the other 6 categories, including acrylic, nylon, and fiberglass.

Recycling Plastic

Only the first two, PET and HDPE, are easily recyclable and they are what most recycling programs focus on. While it is possible to recycle PVC and LDPE, they are problematic. PVCs contain a lot of toxins and LDPE is difficult to process. You need to call your local recycling center to see what types of plastics they take. Finally, PP, PS, and Other aren't recyclable at all. That's disturbing if you think about the amount of Styrofoam packaging is still in use.

Recycling Maximum

Have you noticed that PP and PET are often used together? So, while we focus on recycling bottles, the caps aren't part of that process. Plus, in order to maintain the integrity of the chemical, PET and HDPE can only be recycled about 10 times – sort of like how you can only recycle paper a certain number of times before the fibers become too short to produce any usable product.

Cost of Doing Business

Finally, to throw one final wrench in the mix, it is cheaper to make new plastic than it is to recycle old plastic. Manufacturers will always err on the cheaper side – something about profits and capitalism. While some consumers are able to pay more for recycled products, those who can't afford to will simply continue to use virgin plastic.

Managing Plastic Waste

So, should you even bother recycling plastic? The answer is, probably not. The two current problems we have with plastic are that it isn't biodegradable and it is everywhere (leaking toxins and breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces). The safest place to put plastic waste is in a contained space where we can manage it later, when we develop a way to break down plastic's chemistry. Landfills aren't perfect, but they do contain the pollution. And perhaps someday, we'll be able to isolate or design an enzyme to biodegrade plastic.

Source: <https://lifehacker.com/should-you-even-bother-recycling-your-plastics-1839640349>

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Vitamin A	10%

Saturated Fat 1g	5%
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Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%
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