

Closing the Recycling Loop: Buying Recycled Products

Recycling is not just throwing your recyclables into a bin; you play a role throughout the recycling process. In the recycling symbol's "chasing arrow" design, each arrow represents a stage in the recycling process. The first arrow represents you putting your recyclable materials into a recycling bin. The second arrow represents the processors and manufacturers that sort, ship, and make new products. The third arrow is you again! It represents the purchase of recycled products. There would be no incentive to recycle anything if you didn't complete the recycling loop by purchasing recycled products. So how do you find recycled products? Here's what to look for.

Recyclable vs. Recycled

There's a difference between recyclable and recycled so be sure to read labels carefully.

Recyclable = the product or packaging can be recycled through a local recycling program. And don't take the manufacturer's word for it. You also must take into account what is accepted in your local recycling program. It's only "recyclable" if there's a program to recycle it.

- Three wide arrows pointing at each other in the form of a triangle indicate that you can recycle the product or container bearing the symbol where programs are available.



Recycled = the product or packaging is made of used (recycled) materials.

- If the recycling symbol appears inside a shaded circle, the product contains at least some recycled material. A number inside the arrows tells you the percentage of recycled material in the product.



Recycled products can be found in all shapes and sizes in local stores. Look for recycled products ranging from cat litter to carpet, lunch bags to lumber, mulch to mattresses.

In office supply stores, look for recycled content listed on paper items, including copy paper, envelopes, legal pads, sticky notes, file folders and much more. Plastic desk accessories, pens and pencils, metal waste baskets, shipping mailers, and even office furniture are just a few other items that may contain recycled material.

At the home and garden center, look for garden hoses, compost bins, playground equipment, paint, carpet, tiles, mats, decking and deck furniture with recycled content.

In grocery stores, look for recycled toilet and facial tissues, paper towels, and trash bags, just to name a few recycled products. Packaging is another place to look for recycled content in the grocery store. Several packaging materials typically have a significant amount of recycled content even if it isn't identified on the packaging.

- Steel cans
- Aluminum cans
- Glass bottles and jars
- Molded pulp containers (like egg cartons and fruit trays)



RECYCLABLE



Polyethylene terephthalate

PETE



High-density polyethylene

HDPE

BOTTLES & JUGS ONLY

Plastics Labeling

Don't forget that the SPI code for plastics doesn't necessarily mean it's recyclable. The Society of the Plastics Industry (SPI) chose to use the "chasing arrows" symbol as part of its identifying code for different plastic resins. The number inside them and letters below indicate the plastic resin; a helpful guideline when trying to determine the recyclability of the plastic item. But you also must factor in the shape of the container because different shapes are made in different ways. For example, a yogurt tub is formed when heated material is forced into a mold (injection molding) and a clamshell container is stamped from a thin sheet of plastic (thermoforming), while a soda bottle starts as a small tube that is heated and blown into a mold like a balloon (blow molding). The melting temperatures and 'flow' characteristics are different for each and, as a result, they may not be recycled together. Blow-molded plastics make up a greater percentage of the residential waste stream than other plastic types and, therefore, have more established recycling programs.

That's why we recycle just #1 bottles and #2 jugs in Anchorage.

NOT RECYCLABLE



Vinyl or Polyvinyl chloride

PVC



Low-density polyethylene

LDPE



Polypropylene

PP



Polystyrene

PS



Miscellaneous plastics not covered in the other categories

OTHER

Post-consumer recycled content = materials that have been collected from consumers through drop-off or curbside recycling programs.

Post-industrial or pre-consumer recycled content = materials that have been put back into the manufacturing process at the manufacturing facility. This is a typical part of the manufacturing process to avoid waste and increase efficiency.

Look for the highest percentage possible of post-consumer recycled content to be sure you are supporting actual residential and business recycling programs.