

Plastics Recycling

Effective July 1, 2020

The only plastics accepted for recycling will be
#1 & #2 plastic bottles and jugs

Why just bottles & jugs (#1 & #2) ?

- What can be recycled is driven by markets. When markets are not available in certain regions of the country, some materials can't be recycled. Currently, there are no viable markets for plastics, other than #1 and #2 bottles and jugs.
- Markets may be available in other regions but the costs of transporting materials long distances outweigh the benefits of recycling.
- By focusing our efforts on collecting what can be recycled in the current markets, we can still make an impact and maintain our program.
- Contamination (placing unacceptable materials in the recycling containers) is what hurts recycling the most. Please help fight the contamination problem by only recycling the materials that are accepted in our program.

Plastic recycling presents a challenge because the plastic is often contaminated by other materials and consumer goods companies are reluctant to buy recycled plastic unless it is as pure as virgin plastic. Many recyclables become contaminated when items are placed in the wrong bin, or when a dirty food container gets into the recycling bin. Contamination can prevent large batches of material from being recycled.

Plastic #1 and #2 are relatively recyclable and markets for these plastics exist. These materials get chopped up, melted into pellets and sold to manufacturers for reuse to be made into carpet, clothing, plastic packaging, and other products.

Recycling gets more complicated with higher numbers, called "mixed plastic". It's much more expensive and energy intensive to process than #1 and #2. In the past, many recycling facilities would export mixed plastics, often to China. For decades, China handled the recycling of almost half of the world's discarded materials, because its manufacturing sector was booming and needed these materials to feed it. In 2018, China's *National Sword* policy banned the import of most plastics and other materials that were not up to new, more stringent purity standards. Without the Chinese market for plastic — as well as for some types of cardboard, paper, and glass — the U.S. recycling industry was upended. Recycling facilities had to scramble to find new markets and, in many regions, no markets were available. With the lack of current markets for mixed plastics, recycling processors in this area of Virginia are unable to accept these materials.

