



WORKING TOWARD "Zero Waste" IN PACKAGING

Plastics deliver performance using lighter, and often less, material than alternatives, which is just one of the reasons plastics have become materials of choice for all sorts of packaging. Plastic bottles, containers, and films have made it possible to ship and serve more food with less waste and spoilage so we save money and reduce our impact on the environment.

But lightweighting and slimming package design is just part of the solution. Recycling is also important, and it's never been easier to recycle many kinds of plastic packaging including bottles, caps, rigid containers and polyethylene film. And beyond recycling, innovative technologies are being developed to recover the fraction of non-recycled plastics by converting it into energy, engineered, fuels, and ingredients for new products.

Recycling By the Numbers

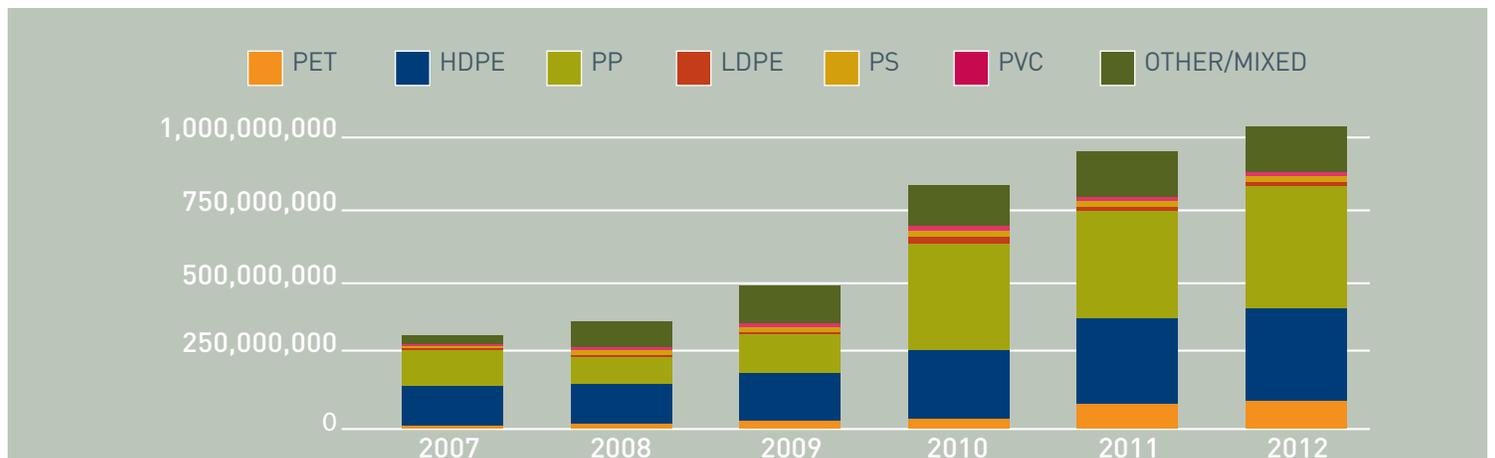
BOTTLES

OVER 2.8B lb. of plastic bottles were recycled in the United States in 2012. Notably, the collection of high-density polyethylene (HDPE, #2) bottles—a category that includes milk jugs and bottles for household cleaners and detergents—rose 45.3 million pounds to top one billion pounds for the first time, helping to boost the recycling rate for HDPE bottles from 29.9 to 31.6 percent. Additionally, a recent national report found that 94% of Americans can recycle plastic bottles in their community. Every pound of these materials recycled is a pound of plastic packaging that is recycled, reducing the amount of material sent to landfills and moving us closer to zero waste.

OTHER RIGIDS

NEARLY 1.02B lb. of "rigid" plastics including rigid containers—the category of plastics that includes things like yogurt cups, dairy tubs and lids—were recycled in 2012, nearly triple the amount for 2007. A recent study also found that access to recycling of many types of these rigid containers (HDPE, PP, PET, LDPE) now exceeds 60 percent of the population. That's important, because a company can label a package "recyclable" for its packaging or product when it can show that there's 60% or better access to recycling nationally for that packaging.

NON-BOTTLE RIGID PLASTIC RECOVERED YEAR OVER YEAR (BY RESIN)



BAGS AND FILM



In 2012, more than one billion pounds of plastic film, bags and wraps—the category of plastics that includes things like grocery and retail bags, newspaper bags, dry cleaning bags, diaper bags and wraps from bread, bathroom tissue, paper towels, and beverage cases—were recycled in the United States—up 56 percent from 2005.

Due to growth in drop-off programs and increased knowledge, plastic film recycling is growing at a solid pace. Today there are more than 18,000 locations across the country where consumers can drop off polyethylene bags and wraps for recycling, typically in specially marked bins in front of large grocery and retail chains (find your nearest retail location by visiting: plasticfilmrecycling.org). ACC is working with the Sustainable Packaging Coalition to promote the recycling label for film plastics to enhance recognition and increase recycling of this material.

ENERGY RECOVERY

Whenever possible, plastics should be recycled, but when plastics are contaminated with food or other materials, or are made from multiple materials and can't be recycled, there remains a tremendous opportunity to recover the inherent energy in plastics to power our homes, vehicles and businesses. A recent study conducted by the Earth Engineering Center (EEC) of Columbia University and sponsored by the American Chemistry Council found that if all of the non-recycled plastics that are currently put into landfills each year in the United States were converted to energy using currently available technologies, they could provide at least enough energy to fuel six million cars annually. A variety of new technologies are being developed to tap this resource, including processes that turn plastics into fuel – one called “plastics to oil” that yields a liquid fuel, and another that engineers scrap plastic with other materials to make a high-tech solid fuel. Recovering the energy value of used, non-recycled plastics provides a needed domestic energy source, helps reduce the amount of material that is sent to landfills, and moves us closer to zero waste.



ADDITIONAL EFFORTS ARE NEEDED

While plastics recycling is growing dramatically for rigids and films, additional work is needed. That's why ACC is supporting the Keep America Beautiful National Ad Council Campaign to promote recycling and efforts by Curbside Value Partnership and others to identify and expand best practices for recycling.



PlasticPackagingFacts.org

SOURCES

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2012 National Post-Consumer Plastics Bottle Recycling Report
<http://plastics.americanchemistry.com/bottlereport>

2012 Plastic Film and Bag Recycling Collection: National Reach Study
<http://plastics.americanchemistry.com/filmreport>

2012 National Report on Post-Consumer Non-Bottle Rigid Plastic Recycling
<http://plastics.americanchemistry.com/Education-Resources/Publications/2012-National-Report-on-Post-Consumer-Non-Bottle-Rigid-Plastic-Recycling.pdf>

2011 Report from Columbia University's Earth Engineering Center: Energy and Economic Value of Non-recycled Plastics and Municipal Solid Wastes
<http://plastics.americanchemistry.com/columbiareport>