

Why can't I recycle all #2 plastics?



Guest Blogger - Michigan Mary with help from Envision Plastics

Knowing what to recycle can be downright confusing at times.

We have always been curious as to why some types of plastic are not able to be recycled. If we can recycle water bottles why not plastic cups? Why can't all #2's be recycled?

Just think about a pancake and a biscuit - although they are made of the same ingredients, (water, eggs, flour and milk) there are different quantities of these ingredients within each item. Pancake batter is runnier than biscuit batter making it easier to pour whereas biscuit batter is more easily molded. Also, once you make the batter for each item, you cook them at similar temperatures but for different lengths of time.

Pancakes cook relatively quickly at a high direct heat, while biscuits have to be put in an oven and given time to bake. Plastics are the same way. They all have the same initial components which constitute being plastic and relate to the number they are given (i.e., 1-7), however, the individual makeup within each product dictates our ability to recycle it. **Injection grade plastics like a water bottle** are similar to pancakes and **mold grade plastics such as a fast food container or berry carton** are similar to biscuits. So even though a plastic item may have #2 on the bottom of it, not all #2's are the same.

Basic idea: Injection Molding and Blow Molded plastics melt at a different temperatures. The factory that buys back that plastic wants materials that all melt at the same temperature for its feedstock to make new plastic products.

Also remember this when teaching: **A number on a piece of plastic tells where it is coming from, not where it is going.** It may have a number one on it meaning it is made of PET plastic, but it is not necessarily going to be sent to the recycler if it is not a bottle.



In NC, by law we should be recycling all plastic bottles, # 1 – 7. That is, unless it held an automotive product such as motor oil, transmission fluid, or held a pesticide or herbicide or other poison.

Depending on the type of plastic, plastic bottles can be recycled into detergent jugs, drink bottles, playground equipment, office supplies, car parts, carpet, clothing, bowls, shavers, cups, fiberfill for jackets and sleeping bags, toys, garbage cans and carts, etc.

