

## WHAT AM I ABLE TO RECYCLE?

### Plastics

Did you know that every year we produce enough plastic film in this country to shrink-wrap Texas? Or that although Americans recycle more than 2.4 billion pounds of plastic each year, it only makes up around 27 percent of the waste stream? While plastic offers the advantages of being flexible and lightweight, it also consumes fossil resources for its manufacture and contributes waste in our environment.

**Make Sure It's Clean!** Does that plastic lunch container still have yesterday's pizza in it? Don't recycle it until it's clean! One dirty product, or one with food waste still in it, can contaminate an entire bale, containing thousands of pounds of collected plastics. This can cause thousands of recyclable items to go to a landfill instead of being recycled. Cleanliness is essential.

**What's Accepted?** Plastics come in a variety of shapes, colors and chemical formulations - all with different recycling needs. The code number does not mean the plastic can be recycled. It is simply a way to identify the resin, or plastic type.

**How can you tell what kinds of plastic to put into your recycling bin?** The code number on the bottom of your product is not a reliable indicator of whether something can get recycled. Recycle by shape! Bottles, jars, and jugs – is the best way to know what is accepted.

**Learn About Recycling Plastics:** Remember to keep dirty containers out of your recycling bin. One partially empty soda bottle in a bale of plastic can spoil the whole load. Plastic grocery and produce sacks are commonly placed in recycle bins. These bags can shut down an entire recycling plant and should be kept out of our recycling bin. Plastic bags are often collected in barrels at grocery stores, and usually end up as plastic lumber. PET plastic is the most common material used for single-use bottled beverages, because it is inexpensive, lightweight, unbreakable and easy to recycle. It takes more than 1.5 million barrels of oil to produce a year's supply of water bottles. That's enough oil to fuel 100,000 cars for a year.

### Metals

Do you think of your empty soda cans and food cans as a natural resource? They are. Americans currently discard about 2.7 million tons of aluminum each year. Of that, about 50% is recycled. Apart from the economic impact, the environmental savings of recycling metal are enormous. Recycling steel and tin cans, for example, saves 74% of the energy used to produce them.

**Aluminum Cans:** On average, Americans drink one beverage from an aluminum can every day. But we recycle just over 49% of the cans we use. Since the cans are 100% recyclable, we could drastically reduce the energy needed to produce brand new cans simply by recycling our empties. An aluminum can is able to be returned to the shelf, as a new can, as quickly as 60 days after it's put into your recycling container. Coast-to-coast, there are about 10,000 locations that buy aluminum, making it easy for Americans to redeem their used beverage cans for cash. In fact, recycling aluminum cans is a \$1 billion/year industry in this country. Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a television for three hours.

#### A Day in the Life of a Recycled Can

1. Customer takes can to a recycling center or puts it into a recycling bin.
2. The can is transported to a processing facility.
3. A giant magnet lifts out cans that are made of metals such as steel. Aluminum cans aren't magnetic so they drop down to a conveyor belt and are gathered.
4. The aluminum is shredded, washed and turned into aluminum chips.
5. The chips are melted in a large furnace.
6. The melted aluminum is poured into molds called "ingots."
7. The ingots are taken to a factory where they're melted into rolls of thin, flat sheets.
8. From the sheets, manufacturers make new products, including new beverage cans, pie pans, license plate frames, and aluminum foil.
9. Beverage companies fill the cans and deliver them to grocery stores for customers to purchase.
10. Customers take used cans to a recycling center and the process starts all over again.

**Aluminum Foil and Bakeware:** During World War II, Americans saved aluminum foil and even peeled off the silver wrapping from chewing gum wrappers to contribute to the war effort. Today, we recycle the foil to conserve energy and protect the environment - two other patriotic causes. There are thousands of products made from aluminum. From food wrap to disposable cookware, to the disposable burner bibs you use to keep your stovetop clean, the list goes on and on. Aluminum can be recycled almost infinitely. The process involves simply re-melting the metal, a process far less costly and energy-intensive than mining the minerals necessary to create new aluminum. For example, Americans discarded 460,000 tons of foil in 2010.

