

MINNESOTA WASTE WISE  
FACT SHEET  
**PLASTICS – GENERAL INFORMATION**

**RESOURCES AND FACTS**

*"I want to say one word to you, just one word...Plastics." – The Graduate*

**Facts from the U.S. EPA:**

- Plastics make up 12.3% of the municipal solid waste stream, or 30 million tons in 2009.
- Of the 30 million tons of plastic waste generated, only 7% was collected for recycling.
- Plastic bags, sacks and wraps were recycled at 9%.
- EPA estimates that in 2005 there were almost 9,000 curbside recycling programs existed and 500 material recovery facilities existed to sort the collected goods.
- American Plastics Council estimates half of all U.S. communities collect plastics for recycling, that's almost 20,000 communities.

We are all aware of the vital role that plastics play in our lives. Plastics are derived from petroleum and are therefore a finite resource making it important to conserve plastic use by reducing, reusing and recycling.

**Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) – Resin Code 1**

Used in beverage, food, and other containers for liquids

**High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) – Resin Code 2**

Used in containers, plastic bags, bottles, bottle caps, plastic lumber, with many other uses.

**Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) – Resin Code 3**

Commonly used in construction projects, notably piping, wiring, and tiling. PVC can also be used in clothing and electronic products.

**Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE) – Resin Code 4**

Used in grocery bags, food wrappings, and power cable sheathings.

**Polypropylene (PP) – Resin Code 5**

Used in plastic bags and containers, as synthetic fibers (in carpeting, clothing, and insulating materials like Thinsulate™ made by 3M) and is extensively used in cars for its strength, light weight, and heat resistant capabilities.

**Polystyrene (PS – Styrofoam) – Resin Code 6**

Used regularly in the packaging of food, electronic goods, appliances, toys and furniture. Polystyrene is also used in single use food containers, fast food containers, insulated liquid containers and lids.

**Other – Resin Code 7**

Contains all other types of plastics, including the corn derived Polylactic Acid which can be composted at a specialty composting facility. Polylactic Acid cannot be recycled with resin codes 1 and 2, it is seen as a contaminant and is expensive for recyclers to sort out.

**Currently recycling markets only exist *widespread* for plastics with resin code 1 and 2.** Demand for this market segment often outpaces the supply of recycled goods. PET resins are often recycled into carpet fibers. HDPE is primarily recycled into bottles but can also be made into landscaping and garden products. Plastics with resin codes other than 1 or 2 are generally disposed of in the trash but this depends on how the plastic is generated (*example: production/manufacturing? or household food packaging?*), if it has food contamination, the quantities that are generated and the opportunities and services available to your company.

Minnesota Waste Wise can assist your business with finding these opportunities through strategic environmental sustainability consulting services. Minnesota Waste Wise also provides an opportunity for businesses to recycle stretch wrap and other plastic film material that is generated on-site through *It's in the Bag*. To learn more about Minnesota Waste Wise services or *It's in the Bag*, please visit [www.mnwastewise.org](http://www.mnwastewise.org), [www.itsinthebagmn.org](http://www.itsinthebagmn.org), or email [mnwastewise@mnchamber.com](mailto:mnwastewise@mnchamber.com).

MINNESOTA  
WASTE WISE

400 North Robert Street  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
[www.mnwastewise.org](http://www.mnwastewise.org)