

Yes, you can create new products from old plastics

Clothing, carpet fibres, garden hoses, pallets, shoe soles, building panels, furniture and liquid fuel are among the products that can be created from recycled plastic.

The good news is that all plastics marked with the Plastics Identification Code 1-7 can be turned into new material¹. So recycling discarded plastic could be of real value to your business.

You will also benefit the environment, as plastic is a major contaminant in our cities, towns, agricultural areas, bush land, waterways and the ocean.



The benefits of recycling plastic

Plastic is used in everything from automotive and aircraft fittings to office equipment; from packaging to CDs. Most plastic can profitably be used again.

There is considerable cost to the environment in throwing away this valuable resource. Apart from polluting the environment, the hidden cost is that plastic is manufactured from petrochemicals in an energy intensive process. So when you discard plastic items you are also losing the energy and the fossil fuels effectively locked into the material.

Reusing old plastic can save 80 to 90 per cent of the energy required to produce the same item from virgin materials².

Using the Plastics Identification Code

There is a wide range of plastics and not all can be recycled the same way. The Plastics Identification Code lists seven different types of plastic that can be recycled. The identification is based on the type of resin used. The code is stamped on products so people can identify and separate different plastics for recycling³.

Look for the familiar triangle with a number inside it when sorting plastics for recycling.

Simple ways to cut plastic costs

Think in terms of the waste hierarchy. How can you avoid, reduce, reuse or recycle different plastics?

- Avoid** → **Do we need it?**
- Reduce** → **Do we need so much?**
- Reuse** → **Can we use it again?**
- Recycle** → **Can someone else use it or convert it into something new?**

1 The Plastics Identification Code (2010). <http://www.pacia.org.au/Content/PIC.aspx>

2 Bureau of International Recycling (2010). <http://www.bir.org/industry/plastics/>

3 Clean up Australia, (2010). *Plastic recycling fact sheet*, http://www.cleanup.org.au/PDF/au/cua_plastic_recycling_fact_sheet.pdf



AVOID

Take a look at your current processes and what is in your bin. Find ways to reduce the need for plastic items that end up in the bin. For example, if you run a takeaway shop, consider providing alternatives to expanded polystyrene (Styrofoam) cups. Consider holding stock in reusable containers, instead of plastic bags.



REDUCE

When considering the purchase of new items made from plastic you could restrict the number of the different types of plastic used in your business. Reducing the types of plastic your business uses will simplify recycling.

Refer to the Plastics Identification Code to make it easier.

Look at ways of cutting down on plastic products or using them more efficiently.

You could tell clients and suppliers you want to reduce your impact on the environment and ask them to assist. Encourage customers to bring in cloth or reusable bags, instead of handing out plastic bags.



REUSE

Where practical consider introducing reusable shipping containers such as plastic bins, totes, crates or palletised containers to transport goods from your business. These are often considered better for protecting shipped goods.

Reuse plastic bags for short term storage, collection of recyclable material or waste disposal.



RECYCLE

Visit BusinessRecycling.com.au to find local recycling service providers for different types of plastic. The site allows you to search for the nearest recycling service provider for various materials.

Ask your recycling contractors which types of plastic they can accept and how these should be prepared. The best return comes through separating the seven plastic types listed in the code. However, some types of plastic are accepted in commingled bins which allow different recycling materials to be collected in the same bin.

Plastics contaminated with other materials are usually not accepted. Avoid cross contamination in bins by putting up clear signs.

You will achieve the best outcomes and pay the lowest collection charges by training staff on how to use the recycling system. Ask service providers about staff training and signs for bins.

Here are some more tips:

- Consider investing in a bailer if your business generates a significant amount of a particular type of plastic. Cleaned, sorted and bailed plastic has a market value.
- If there is not enough plastic to justify a separate bin, consider sharing a plastics recycling bin with an adjacent business.
- Clearly demonstrate to staff how they can recycle common plastic items at work.
- Make sure your contractors and cleaners understand your recycling program and they put particular plastics in the correct bins.

While separating plastics may require additional dedicated recycling bins, the advantage is that your business may be able to sell plastics or not have to pay for its collection.

For further information

Waste and Resource Recovery
Resource Recovery Unit
Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au

EPA 2012/0355 November 2012
ISBN 978-1-74293-890-5

Published by:

Environment Protection Authority
59–61 Goulburn Street, Sydney South 1232
Ph: 131 555 (environment information and publications requests)
TTY: (02) 9211 4723
Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au Web: www.epa.nsw.gov.au
Report pollution and environmental incidents: Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only)