



Frequently Asked Questions about Plastic Film Recycling

What is “plastic film”?

Plastic film is thin polyethylene plastic used for wraps, packaging or commercial/retail use bags. It’s sometimes called stretch film. Polyethylene (PE) film may carry a #2 HDPE or #4 LDPE mark.

What types of plastic film and bags should I recycle?

Most clean and dry plastic films and bags are 100% recyclable at participating retail and local drop off locations. Some of the most common examples are shown. Also, any bag or wrap with the How2Recycle label shown can be put in the bin. Generally, if plastic film stretches when you pull it with your fingers, it’s okay to recycle it.

Where can I recycle plastic film and bags?

In most communities around the United States, plastic film, wraps and bags should be taken to participating retail locations or local drop off sites. Please see below for more information about why bags shouldn’t go in curbside bins.

Why can’t I put my bags in my curbside bin/cart?

While a few local programs accept bags and wraps in their curbside collection programs, most do not. That’s because the bags and wraps have to be clean and dry to be recycled, and collecting them in curbside bins with bottles and containers generally leaves them too dirty and wet to be recycled. Additionally, bags and films can jam sorting machinery, creating problems for the businesses that sort recyclables.

Why can't frozen food or pre-washed salad bags go into the bin with my carryout bags?

Many of these bags may contain a barrier polymer or other additives that is not the polyethylene (#’s 2 and 4) plastic that recyclers want. These polymer barriers help protect the food and extend shelf life but recyclers consider them to be a contaminant in the recycling bin.

Can I recycle it if...

The plastic is colored?

YES. Colored material is not a problem for recycling.

It tears like paper?

NO. This type of plastic is currently not accepted in bag recycling bins.

It crinkles loudly (like candy wrappers or chip bags) when I mash it in my hand?

NO. Please do not include, as it is not currently acceptable for recycling.

It has labels or tape?

YES, but labels, tape, and adhesive strips SHOULD BE REMOVED prior to putting it in the recycling bin. The integrity of the bag isn't important—the recycler just wants the clean plastic.

It is thicker, stiff plastic like pet food bags or bedding bags (including anything with a zipper)?

NO. These are not the same type of plastic as what recyclers want, so DO NOT include.

If it says it's degradable AND recyclable?

Currently, these bags cannot be placed in drop-off bins. The recyclers reprocessing bags don't want the products they are making to degrade over time so these bags are not acceptable.

It is dirty, has crumbs, or is wet?

NO. Recyclers need the bags and film to be CLEAN and DRY. Please don't include dirty or wet bags, or any material that has food or other residues. **If in doubt, throw it out!**

What happens to my bags and wraps after they're recycled?

Plastic bags are recycled into many different products. Most bags and film are turned into composite lumber, but they can be reprocessed into small pellets or post-consumer resin, which can be used to make a variety of new products, such as new bags, pallets, containers, crates, and pipe. [Watch this video](#) to learn more about how your bags and wraps can become new composite lumber.