

Can Recycling Be Bad for the Environment?

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Recycling may not always be good for the environment.

(PhysOrg.com) -- By now, nearly everyone knows that it is important to recycle. It helps the environment. Even my six-year-old knows that. But what if it doesn't? While it seems pretty straightforward, in most cases, there are times when recycling can harm more than it helps. This is especially true when plastics are involved.

Recycling paper and glass is pretty straightforward. Metal is also fairly straightforward. But plastics are different. Plastics have a complex chemical make-up that changes the equation. If you look on a plastic container, you might notice a number by the recycle sign. These numbers run from one to seven, and each has a different meaning. (You can go to the Daily Green for a [list of plastics numbers and what they mean.](#))

Before you chuck your plastics into the bin, you need to know whether or not your city's waste disposal program can handle that type of plastic. My city claims that it can handle anything numbered one through six. The city is clear that it does not want packaging that does not have a number on it. Some municipalities only have the ability to handle plastics labeled with ones and twos. [Discover points out](#) the problem that comes with mixing plastics:

"Any contamination in the recycle bin compromises the strength and durability of the recycled plastic that is produced, which in turn compromises its future use as a material for manufacturers. A recycled container needs to be strong enough to hold the weight of the contents inside, and many container shapes already contain weak spots where the plastic has a reduced thickness—near a bottle's handle, for example."

Weaker materials mean that fewer companies are willing to use recycled materials in their products. And that means that more resources are consumed in favor of creating all-new packaging. Which is bad for the environment. Some say that this means you should reduce the amount of products you buy that contain plastic. But whether you decide to go that route or not, if you are concerned about the environment, you might make sure that you aren't doing more harm than good when you place [plastics](#) in your recycle bin.

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