



Reduce your plastic use, and recycle what you can

Ease of recycling by type



All formal households in Cape Town receive weekly kerbside refuse removal, and 99,74% of informal settlements have access to a door-to-door refuse collection service or ongoing area-cleaning services (the remaining 0,26% are areas without the necessary access to deliver the service).

The City's Think Twice kerbside recycling programme is now offered to more than 200 000 households and, together with other waste minimisation programmes, diverts more than 50 000 tons of recyclables – more than 21% of collected waste – from landfill every year.

If you have the service, please use it. If not, take your plastic to a drop-off facility.



Everything plastic is not equal – nor are the difficulties of recycling it

First prize is not to have to recycle plastic at all. This means minimising your use of plastic wherever possible. Most plastic packaging is marked with a recycling logo and a “resin identification” number. This helps in pointing out what’s recyclable. When plastics are recycled, they are often “downcycled” – used to make a lower-quality plastic.

1. PET (polyethylene terephthalate). This is commonly used for beverage bottles, and showed a steady increase in recycling, especially in the Western Cape where the drought caused a spike in the sales of bottled water. This put more PET water bottles into the recycling stream and so relieved the pressure on the limited supply of virgin PET. PET is recycled into clothing, bedding, carpeting, food pack-aging, insulation, synthetic wood and more.

2. PE-HD. High-density polyethylene (PE-HD or HDPE) bottles, drums and crates are the third-largest recycled polymer in South Africa. HDPE is recycled into compost bins, dustbins, pallets, refuse bags, carrier bags, pipes and plastic timber products. PE-HD is recycled into shoe soles, pipes, hoses, door mats, car mats, gumboots, conduit, speed humps, traf-fic cones and sewage pipes.

3. PVC (polyvinyl chloride). This can be rigid or flexible. Rigid PVC is used in the construction industry for products such as water pipes and vents, wastepipes, conduit and guttering. Soft, flexible PVC is used to make rainwear, gum-boots, shoe soles, artificial leather, garden hoses, medical tubing, flooring, banners and cable insulation, among others. PVC is dubbed the “poison plastic” because it con-tains heavy toxins that can leach out throughout its entire life cycle, particularly if it is burned. Almost all products using PVC require virgin material for their construction, and very little PVC material is recycled.

4. PE-LD/PE-LLD. The most widely recycled material in South Africa is low-density polyethylene (PE-LD and PE-LLD) packaging films. This is also the most common plastic, with around 80 million tons produced annually worldwide. It is primarily used in packaging such as plastic bags, plastic films and wrappings. Most collectors can identify PE-LD films and markets are well established. LDPE is recycled into refuse bags, pallets, irrigation pipes, containers and construction and building film.

5. PP (polypropylene). PP is used in a wide variety of products, including ice cream, yoghurt, margarine and cottage cheese tubs, drinking straws, microwave dishes, packaging tape, bottle caps and coat hangers. PP can be recycled into containers, rubbish bins, shopping baskets, coat hangers, furniture and storage containers.

6. PS (polystyrene). This comes in two forms – high-im-pact, from which products such as coat hangers, breadtags and yoghurt containers are made, and expanded poly-styrene, the softer stuff from which meat and vegetable trays and packaging pellets are made. Polystyrene can be recycled into rulers, pens, seedling trays, coat hangers and more. Recycled polystyrene can also be mixed with cement and used in construction.

7. ‘Other’ plastics are marked with a ‘7’ inside the recycling logo and the name of the plastic, such as such as acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) or polycarbonate (PC). Number 7 can also refer to multilayer plastics, such as those used in toothpaste tubes or filter coffee pods. In theory, most of these plastics can be recycled. In practice, it’s difficult.

- Plastics can be dropped off for recycling at any of the City’s 25 recycling and waste drop-off facilities.