

Breaking the Plastic Code

The real meaning of the recycling symbol



We've all seen them – plastic resin codes – those stamps on every plastic container with a recycling symbol and a number in the middle. You may think it means the item is recyclable, but that's not really its purpose. The symbol does not mean a certain plastic is recyclable in all areas. It's time to forget them for good!

The numbers inside the recycling symbols are used by the plastics industry to identify specific resin types, which are related to the chemical make-up of the product. In the early years of plastic container recycling, the general message was that #1 and #2 are recyclable, and the rest go in the trash. Those days are over, as packaging has become more complex, and recycling technology and markets have changed. A take-

out container may have #1 or #6, but regardless of the number, it is not currently accepted by the sorting facilities where Mason County's material is taken. Ignore the symbol. Ask yourself, when it comes to recycling plastics in Mason County, "Is it a bottle, jug, jar, or dairy tub?" If not – it goes in the trash.

In order to reduce consumer confusion, current efforts are underway by the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM) to modify the resin codes and remove the "recycling symbol" from the stamp. In the next few years, the "recycling symbol" found on all of our plastic containers may be a thing of the past. Speaking of the past, remember, resin ID codes may indicate a bottle's past, but they don't predict its future.