OKLAHOMA
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

707 North Robinson, P.O. Box 1677, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73101-1677

News Release

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Contact: Skylar McElhaney, (405) 702-7167

Plastic Recycling Codes – What do they Mean?

Many plastics can be recycled, but understanding the plastic numbers molded into the bottom of containers can be confusing. Different plastics require different processing, which makes it easier to recycle some types of containers and more difficult to recycle others. The symbol that consumers see on the bottom of plastic containers is a code that ranges from one to seven and is surrounded by a triangle of arrows. The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) encourages Oklahomans to recycle plastic.

The most common plastics recycled are made of polyethylene terephthalate (PETE) and are assigned the number one. Examples include soda and water bottles, some food containers, and many others. These containers can be recycled into fleece, tote bags, and strapping.

Number two is used for high-density polyethylene plastics. These include laundry detergent containers, milk jugs, shampoo bottles, grocery bags, and cereal box liners. Plastic labeled with number two can be recycled into toys, piping, rope, and flower pots.

Polyvinyl chloride, used in shower curtains, medical tubing, and vinyl dashboards, is a number three. Number four is for grocery and sandwich bags, and five is for plastic used in medicine bottles, and ketchup and syrup bottles. These numbers are not recycled as easily as numbers one and two. Many recycling centers will not accept numbers three through five due to its low rate of recyclability.

Number six is used for polystyrene (Styrofoam) items like coffee cups, meat trays, disposable cutlery, and protective foam packaging. Items crafted from various combinations of plastics are imprinted with the number seven. Number seven plastics are the most difficult to recycle and are often not accepted at recycling centers.

“Recycling provides environmental benefits that can’t be ignored,” said DEQ Director of Waste Systems Planning Fenton Rood. “Up to 90 percent of our trash has the potential to be recycled,” he added.

Recycling may not be available in all areas. For more information on recycling in general and recycling plastics, visit http://www.deq.state.ok.us/lpdnew/Recyclingindex.htm.

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