

Debunked: Tackling Five Myths About Ashland's Recycling

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Complimentary Article-Reading Pro Tip: Read this entire article for some really GOOD news at the end.

Myth #1: If an item has the chasing arrows symbol on it, it's recyclable. No. That symbol isn't trademarked, so any manufacturer can slap it on any product. All too often, sadly, this maneuver is to manipulate you, the consumer, into feeling good about your purchase. The chasing arrow symbol and number (1-7) were created in the late eighties to refer to the general category of plastic resin the item is made from, not its recyclability. Another little known fact: there are over 40,000 types of plastic resin, not seven. This is why we aren't able to recycle "by the numbers". In Ashland & Talent, we can recycle plastic bottles, jugs and rigid containers. Clear plastic containers that hummus and various other sauces come in are not considered rigid - keep these out of your cart. Recycle soft plastic bags at your local grocery store, or at the Ashland Recycle Center — never in your recycling cart. Plastic bags wreak havoc on sorting equipment at recycling facilities, jamming the gears with what becomes a hot gummy plastic, clogging mess that must be regularly removed so the sorting line can keep moving.

Myth #2: It's harder to recycle now. The items allowed in mixed recycling carts in Ashland and Talent are the same currently as in the past. What has changed is the impetus to reduce non-recyclable items in the carts and do a better job of recycling *correctly*. If you check your local list of what is allowed in your cart, while avoiding the urge to "wishfully" recycle items you think should go in, you are doing fantastic work! For a list of "What Goes", please visit Recology.com/Ashland/What Goes

Myth #3: Compostable products like cups, plates and cutlery can be recycled or composted. Ack! Oh no. Disappointingly, most of us have fallen victim to this type of "greenwashing" at some point in our lives. Not even the non-compostable single use items of this nature can go in your recycle cart. Composting and recycling happen in wildly different ways. Compostable serviceware cannot be recycled in your recycling cart, or even in your green debris cart (if you subscribe to this service). When "compostables" end up in recycling carts, they can mix with the high value, desired plastic, and compromise its quality. When compostable products are placed in your green debris cart, they are problematic at their composting facility destination because they don't break down at the rate needed for those facilities to churn out their product. Imagine what it would be like if you dumped out your bag of compost, only to notice small chunks of plastic-like material in the mix; now in your garden. This is a challenge composting facilities deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Myth #4: Lids are recyclable. This is not true. It doesn't matter if the lid is made of the same material the item itself is made of. Lids of all kinds – tin, can, bottle, and rigid plastic tub lids - get easily trapped between pieces of cardboard and paper during the sorting process, contaminating other streams of material. Cardboard boxes with chunks of plastic.

Myth #5: Of the 3-R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), if I'm recycling, I am doing my very best for the planet. Unfortunately, no. Reducing and reusing are far more important than recycling. If you'd like to go the extra green mile, consider buying used instead of new. Did you know that buying a refurbished

computer instead of a new one saves 139 pounds of waste, 7,300 gallons of water, and 2,300 kilowatt hours of energy required to manufacture a new one?

Ashlanders, here's the **GOOD** news:

Our Ashland and Talent community is SO careful and conscious about recycling correctly that our contamination rates are far below national averages. According to the sorting facility where we send our material, we get it right 95-96% of the time, whereas the rest of the country is hovering around getting it right only 70% of the time. Thank you for being part of the solution, and keep up the great work - we know it's not easy and we appreciate your effort! And let's also not forget - reducing and reusing (and repairing) is always far more important than recycling.