



Plastics Recycling

What's the truth?

Myths and misconceptions abound in the plastics recycling industry.

If you're not sure what to believe, you're not alone!

Read on for credible information about plastics recycling at U-M and beyond.

IS RECYCLING PLASTIC “WORTH IT”?

While shifting away from plastics use, reducing overall production, and reuse are preferred, plastics recycling is still an important aspect of sustainable materials management.

There is an often-cited statistic that only 5-9% of plastics in the U.S. are recycled.

THIS IS A BIT MISLEADING.

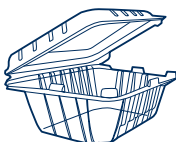
This refers to the percentage of total plastics produced that get recycled, NOT the percentage of recyclable and accepted plastics, placed in recycling bins, that actually get recycled. For example, clean, accepted plastics placed in your recycling bin are not just getting sent to the landfill.

SO,

WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR SUCH LOW RECYCLING RATES FOR TOTAL PLASTICS PRODUCED?

Much of this plastic material is:

- Nonrecyclable types of plastic
- Disposed of in communities without recycling program access



WHY DO RECYCLING RULES VARY BY LOCATION?

What is accepted for recycling depends on the type of plastic, collection capacity, sorting capability at recycling facilities, and available plastics recycling markets. For example, the types of plastics accepted for recycling in San Francisco can be very different from which plastics are accepted in Ann Arbor.

Read on for details of acceptable materials and what happens to them in the locations applicable to the U-M Ann Arbor campus.



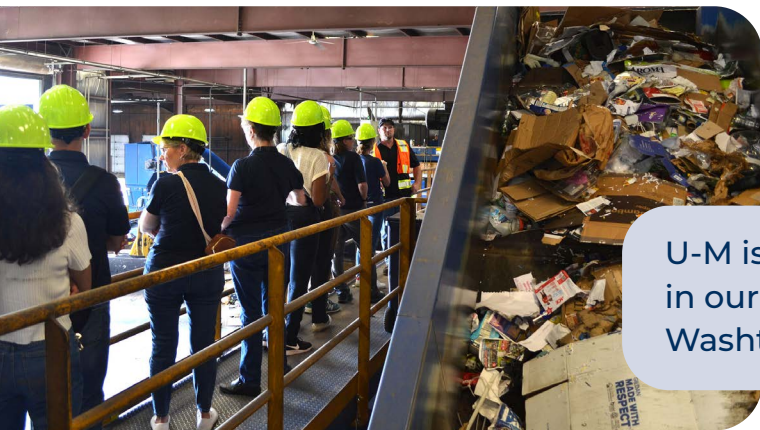
U-M ANN ARBOR CAMPUS

On the U-M Ann Arbor campus, we accept **plastics #1-2 and #4-7** (bottles, tubs, cups, containers, bulky plastics).

Per a 2024 campus waste audit, recyclable plastics comprise 10% of our recycling stream, and 19% of our total waste stream, by weight.

An additional 7% is plastic film, which is not accepted in single-stream recycling, however, there is source-separated collection at several high-generation locations on campus.

- Plastic film goes to Recycle Ann Arbor and then to NexTrex for recycling.



Recyclable plastics go to the Western Washtenaw Recycling Authority in Chelsea, MI. From there, plastics are sent to:

- **Clean Tech (Dundee, MI):**

#1 and #2 plastics are shipped to Clean Tech in Dundee where they are washed, shredded, and turned into pellets.

These pellets are used to make bottles for brands such as Absopure and Tide.

Some plastic is also used for synthetic clothing for companies like The North Face and Patagonia.

- **Mel Tech Plastic (Ontario, CA):**

Rigid plastics are shipped to Mel Tech Plastic Corporation in Canada. There, plastics are ground into pellets and recycled into plastic bins and totes.

- **Recycling Revolution (Boca Raton, FL):**

Plastics #3 – #7 are shipped to Recycling Revolution in Boca Raton, FL where they are resold.

U-M is confident that **ACCEPTED PLASTICS** collected in our recycling program and sent to the Western Washtenaw Recycling Authority are actually recycled.

CITY OF ANN ARBOR

Recycle Ann Arbor's Materials Recovery Facility accepts: #1 and #2 plastic bottles, jars, and jugs, which have the strongest domestic recycling markets, followed by #5 plastic tubs.

These plastics are accepted due to robust markets that support their recycling.

This link has a good video to share with those interested in how plastics fit into the larger recycling picture.

www.recycleannarbor.org/knowledge-base/chasing-arrows-truth-about-recycling

STATE OF MICHIGAN

Like in Ann Arbor, the most commonly accepted and recycled plastics in Michigan are #1, #2, and #5 plastic bottles, containers, and tubs.

The recovery rate for #1 and #2 plastics in Michigan is about 50% according to a [report](#) commissioned by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

Improved recycling access and infrastructure have increased [Michigan's recycling rate](#) to over 25% in 2025 (up from 14%), including 56,000 tons of plastics recycled.

NATIONWIDE

The most commonly accepted and recycled plastics nationwide are #1, #2, and #5 plastic bottles, containers, and tubs.

In the EPA's most recent report, "Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: Facts and Figures 2018":

- 29.1% of #1 PET bottles and jars were recycled
- 29.3% of #2 HDPE bottles were recycled

LEARN MORE IN **Dispelling Plastic Recycling Myths.**



myumi.ch/R32nz

HOW MUCH PLASTIC IS EXPORTED?

Material destinations vary widely across the country, but there has been a marked decrease in plastics being sent overseas. In 2021, 7.7% of plastics were exported overseas, down from 35.9% in 2012.