

# Plastic Bag Recycling

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality encourages households to reuse products and recycle wastes, including plastic bags. Most of the plastic bags that are readily available to household consumers are recyclable, and several grocery store chains and retailers have drop-off locations in Virginia for recycling.

The majority of these bags are made with polyethylene resins. The bags (sometimes called film) are used in retail and grocery stores, with promotional items, and as newspaper, dry cleaning, food storage and packaging wraps. Most of these bags are recyclable, and businesses have a well-established infrastructure for recycling them. For the purposes of recycling collection programs that serve the general public, they are often identified as #2 and as #4 polyethylene bags, which have different densities or thicknesses. Any clean, clear plastic bag labeled as #2 or #4 is recyclable.

Recycling companies encourage household consumers to recycle by the bag type or its general use. Many bags do not contain the recycling symbol because it is not required. For a listing of bags that are generally accepted for recycling by grocery and retail stores and recycling locations, please go to the consumer education section of [www.plasticbagrecycling.org](http://www.plasticbagrecycling.org).

## Bags not usually recycled

Plastic bags made with polypropylene resin make up a small percentage of the bags that consumers use. These bags are made into shipping sacks and some agricultural type bags, as well as some packaging bags for unique items. They generally are not recyclable in the markets that recycle most polyethylene bags and film at this time.

Plastic bags made with polyvinyl chloride are not as common as polypropylene and polyethylene bags and make up a very small percentage of plastic bags available to consumers. They may be reusable bags or promotional bags but generally are not used in packaging.

Both types of plastic bags are recyclable if they are separate from other types of plastic bags and if very large quantities can be accumulated – generally at least 40,000 pounds. For these reasons, there are very few opportunities for household consumers to recycle these types of plastic bags.

Plastic or other bags that contain food, while technically recyclable, are not accepted by recycling companies because of the food contamination.

The majority of recycling collection programs available to the general public consider the following types of plastics as contaminants to plastic bag recycling: food or cling wrap, plastic sandwich bags, pre-packaged food bags (frozen food bags or pre-washed salad bags), black or brightly colored plastic bags, and bags labeled as biodegradable or compostable. Consumers should not save these types of plastics for recycling.

**Recyclable plastic bags**

- Grocery store bags
- Some retail bags
- Dry cleaning bags
- Some food storage and packaging wraps
- Any clean, clear plastic bag labeled with #2 or #4

## Contacts

Recycling and litter prevention officials in local governments may have additional information about where to take plastic bags for recycling in Virginia. Contact information is available on the DEQ website at [www.deq.virginia.gov/recycle/contactlist.html](http://www.deq.virginia.gov/recycle/contactlist.html).