



Consumer Education Programs

Issue: *The content and design of recycling consumer education programs can greatly impact both the quality and the quantity of PET plastics collected, resulting in a more cost-effective recovery program. The improved quality that results from properly designed and implemented consumer education programs ensures that the PET plastics that your program collects yield the highest market value for your community and can be recycled into new products that conserve natural resources.*

Best Practice: There are numerous ways to design and implement consumer education programs that promote your local recycling program and inform the public how to participate. While there is no best practice related to the overall design of your community's consumer education program, there is a best practice as to the basic elements of what should be contained in an effective consumer education program aimed at the collection of post-consumer PET bottles and containers.

There are seven basic messages that should be included in any consumer education or promotional program aimed at the collection of PET bottles and custom containers:

1. Only PET bottles and containers with screw-neck tops should be placed out for collection or brought to a collection location. PET bottles and containers can be identified by looking for the “#1, PET or PETE,” resin identification code found on the bottom of PET bottles and containers. Any non-bottle PET items, like laundry scoops, or microwave trays, should be excluded. These materials introduce contaminants or create technical or economic problems in the PET recycling process.
2. Only PET containers that are clear or transparent green should be included for recycling. PET containers of any other color should be excluded. Pigmented PET bottles and containers other than those listed can cause technical or economic problems in the recycling process and limit the recycling of acceptable PET bottles and containers into new products.
3. Consumers should remove lids, caps and other closures from PET bottles and containers placed out for recycling. This includes safety seals that may secure the closure to the container. Caps and safety seals introduce aluminum and plastic materials that are not made from PET that can contaminate or add cost to the PET recycling process. Cap removal also encourages consumers to rinse containers (*Step 4* below) and allows for easy flattening (*Step 5* below).

4. All PET bottles and containers that are set out for recycling should be completely free of contents and rinsed clean. This reduces logistical difficulties such as odor and attraction of vermin and insects at recycling facilities due to the presence of food residues on bottles and containers.
5. Consumers should flatten PET plastic bottles and containers prior to setting them out for collection or delivery to a collection center. The simple act of flattening containers decreases collection costs by increasing the amount of materials collected by curbside collection vehicles or placed into containers at collection centers. It has been estimated that by simply flattening PET bottles and custom containers, truck collection volumes can be increased by as much as 50%.
6. Consumers should never place any material other than the original contents into PET bottles and containers intended for recycling. Many consumers use old plastic containers to store household chemicals, hardware, etc. Placing these containers into your local recycling program can add contamination to the recycling process or introduce materials that could cause injury to personnel or damage to equipment at recycling processing facilities.
7. Hypodermic needles are an increasing safety concern at recycling processing facilities. Many communities have special collection programs for community residents that have medical conditions that require regular intravenous injections. Very often, these programs request residents to place used needles into sealed plastic containers. Recycling consumer education programs should emphasize to residents that participate in hypodermic needle collection programs that they should never include containers with needles with recyclable materials set out for curbside collection or delivered to a collection center.