

So what is really recyclable?

Submitted by Alexis Baker, Environmental Program Coordinator

Recently, conflicting information has been issued about what can and cannot be recycled in Henderson County. Plastics are often the most confusing for residents. The current message of recycling plastics with a recycling symbol and a #1 or #2 is confusing and incorrect. A simple rule of thumb when taking plastics to the Stoney Mountain Recycling Convenience Center or for those using the available recycling haulers in Henderson County is to look at the shape of the plastics. If the plastic has a neck that is smaller than the base, then it is acceptable for recycling. This has a lot to do with the actual strength of the materials. Even though the plastics may be made of the same chemical materials, they are definitely not created equal, and the local recycling markets will not accept them. Remember, plastic bottles, jars, and jugs are recyclable! Other plastics, regardless of their numbers, such as plastic food storage containers, yogurt containers, and plastic bags are also not accepted. Furthermore, the caps on bottles are not recyclable, and it's best to throw them in the trash.

So, now that we have plastics out of the way, what else is recyclable in Henderson County? The answer is that a large majority of what you may have been throwing away is probably recyclable. All cans are recyclable, including aluminum and steel beverage and food containers. Additionally, most of your mixed paper is recyclable. This includes junk mail, envelopes, newspaper, inserts, magazines, pamphlets, paperback books, packaging, and cardboard. Frozen food containers and juice containers are not recyclable due to a waxy coating on the inside. Most pizza boxes and used paper products are also not recyclable due to oil and food contamination. Portions of the pizza box, however, may be recycled if it is free of food and grease. Residents choosing to visit the Convenience center may put all their plastic, aluminum, and steel containers (bottles, cans, jars, and jugs) into the same bin. Mixed paper and corrugated cardboard should be separated.

Cooking oil is also recyclable at the Stoney Mountain Recycling Convenience Center. Cooking oil is collected by a local vendor, cleaned, and turned into biodiesel for diesel vehicles and some heating oil furnaces. Additionally, used vehicle oil and antifreeze is also recycled at the center.

Every Wednesday from 9am to 12pm, electronics are accepted at the Stoney Mountain transfer station free of charge for recycling. This includes all batteries (please separate rechargeable from non-rechargeable batteries), office equipment, fax machines, printers, copiers, monitors, computers, stereo equipment, electronic circuit boards and components, gaming consoles, telephones and cellphones. Televisions may also be recycled for a fee of \$5 for regular sized televisions and \$15 for consoles and widescreen televisions.

Large metal appliances (white goods) are also accepted free of charge every day. Appliances include washers, dryers, ranges, refrigerators, and other items which are composed of metal. Plastic appliances are not acceptable as white goods.

As an incentive to recycle, the bag for bag program is still in effect. This allows residents to bring in their trash free of charge for an equal amount of recycling.

Still, the biggest incentive for recycling may be the knowledge that you are doing something simple to reduce waste and toxicity in landfills and to improve air and water quality by reducing pollution. It takes less energy and, therefore, produces less pollution to use recycled materials rather than raw materials. As discussed in a previous article, plastics can be turned into valuable materials like new bottles, polar fleece, fiber, tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling, floor tiles, pens, pipes, benches, picnic tables, and fencing. Also, don't forget that plastic is a petroleum product. Rather than using raw materials to make new bottles or other products, the petroleum saved by using recycled materials can be used to run vehicles.

Steel and aluminum cans are very valuable as well and may be used to make new cans or as parts for vehicles, cars, bicycles, and even airplanes. Finally, the recyclable material that likely makes up most of what is currently thrown into a landfill, paper, can be recycled into new paper products like toilet paper, pencils, paper bags, and printer paper.

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