

CLEANING UP DIRTY WORDS

Plastic recyclers need a common language too. The terms used to describe plastics recycling can vary widely and can mean different things to different people. In an effort to improve consumer recycling education, as well as communication within the recycling industry, industry groups and advocates have teamed up to launch the Plastics Terminology Project. BY STACEY LUDDY

Every industry and profession relies on common language that helps practitioners communicate more efficiently and effectively. Unfortunately, the plastic recycling terminology in use today ranges from inconsistent to downright contradictory. Many of the terms currently being used can handicap recycling professionals in their efforts to communicate which plastics are accepted for recycling and which types of plastics are being bought and sold.

Which is why the newly released Plastics Recycling Terms and Tools (Terms and Tools), sponsored by the Plastics Division of the American Chemistry Council (ACC), was developed. The Terms and Tools include two sets of plastic recycling terms: one geared toward consumers – to promote collection through better community outreach; and the other geared toward recycling professionals – to improve data tracking and commodity transactions. The two sets of common terms (outreach and commodity) were developed to help streamline plastic recycling communication throughout the U.S. and Canada.

The move toward common terminology will help alleviate consumer confusion, improve transactions between buyers and sellers and enhance the quality of plastics recycling data.

Why it is needed

Communities consistently report that residents are confused about which plastics to recycle, and recent community surveys confirm the extent of the problem. For the last few years, many have called attention to such issues as the lack of clarity and consistency in existing terminology and the often-inaccurate descriptions of plastics included in community collection materials.

For example, more than one community asks for “Plastics marked 1-9.” Readers likely know that the Resin Identification Code only has seven groups. And even if a community says it collects “Plastics 1-7,” it may not really want *all* plastics. Does the community have the capacity to process all that material? What

about contaminants? A solution needed to be found.

Building on previous plastics recycling outreach work, we developed a set of common plastics recycling outreach terms with an advisory committee representing the full plastics recycling value chain. During the process, Moore Recycling Associates [*Ed:* The author of this article is the COO of that company] solicited input through Re-TRAC Connect and through a survey of over 700 recycling professionals.

Outreach terms

A glossary of common outreach terms and a gallery of associated photographs are now available online, at no cost, to community recycling programs. Used together, the terms and images can help recycling collection program educators communicate more effectively to residents about which plastics to recycle. We believe that by simplifying and streamlining communications, these new resources will make it easier for residents to participate in plastics recycling programs and help communities collect more of the sought-after plastic products.

The Terms and Tools were designed to be simple, intuitive, comprehensive and easy to adopt in existing recycling programs. The outreach terms are presented with three levels of detail:

- Main Categories (very concise),
- Subcategories (more detailed)
- Definitions (very comprehensive)

The main level provides common terminology in broad, succinct categories, such as *Plastic Bottles & Jars* or *Plastic Bottles & Containers* (see the next page for an example). Each main category has subcategories (the middle level) such as *Plastic Soda, Water and other Drink Bottles* or *Plastic Tubs & Lids*. And for programs or situations that require more detail, the third level provides definitions. For example, the definition for the subcategory *Plastic Food and Household Bottles / Jars* is the following: “Screw top bottles/jars – For Example: Food: ketchup, peanut

into this process. Now, we need every community to participate.

We hope you'll take a moment to visit recycleyourplastics.org/termsandtools and consider using the Terms and Tools in your outreach. Together, we can improve plastics recycling by eliminating confusion, increasing collection and reducing contamination. **RR**

It took a year and a half to develop these tools and the plastics recycling industry will remain fast-paced and dynamic. Help us continue to ensure that these terms and tools reflect the current state of the industry. Moore Recycling invites your feedback.

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The Plastics Recycling Terms and Tools Advisory Committee

The Plastics Recycling Terms and Tools Advisory Committee included two plastic processor representatives: Tamsin Ettefagh of Envision Plastics and Jon Stephens of Avangard Innovative; PET industry association representative Kate Eagles of NAPCOR; MRF representatives Kurt Humes of Waste Management, who also participates on APR's rigid plastic recycling committee and Rebecca Jewel, recycling program manager for Waste Management; Steve

Thompson, now-retired executive director of Curbside Value Partnership; Pete Adrian, recycling coordinator at Solid Waste Agency of Lake County, Illinois; Diana Gentilcore with the EPS Industry Alliance; Michael Westerfield with Dart Container; Liz Bedard, director of rigids recycling development at APR; and Kenny Luong with Ming's Recycling, a certified processor and exporter based in California.