

Message in a Bottle: The Myth of PVC Recycling

PVC is Hazardous from Production to Disposal

Production

The production of polyvinyl chloride, commonly known as "PVC" or "vinyl," involves fusing vinyl chloride molecules with plasticizers, stabilizers, and fillers to create the final product. PVC production has been found to expose workers and surrounding communities to high levels of vinyl chloride and other known carcinogens. Studies have shown a link between working in PVC plants and the development of rare liver cancer, angiosarcoma of the liver, and other non-cancer diseases.

Useful Life

Many products are made from PVC plastics. These products include beverage containers, vinyl siding, medical equipment, and children's toys. These products have been found to leach toxic additives during their lives. Toxins from PVC bottles leach into the contents inside the bottle, and eventually into the user. Lotions, soaps, bug repellants, shampoos, and maple syrups are some common products found in PVC containers.

Disposal

Despite PVC industry claims, less than 1% of PVC bottles are recycled every year. The other 99% end up in incinerators or landfills. When burned, PVC releases dioxin, a potent human carcinogen that threatens human and environmental health even at very low concentrations. Burning PVC also releases acutely toxic acid gases into the environment. When buried in landfills, PVC releases toxicants into the earth, and eventually into groundwater.

For more information, please visit www.gtm.org/pvc

PVC Recycling is Not a Solution

PVC Recycling Does Not Exist

PVC recycling began in the 1990s as a vinyl industry attempt to put a pro-environment spin on their product. However, after ten years, the rate of PVC recycling has averaged less than 1% per year and has fallen to barely trace levels. The only time PVC recycling went as high as 2% was during the heavily subsidized Vinyl Institute attempt to jump-start PVC recycling.

PVC Recycling Cannot Exist

PVC's share of the bottle market is simply too small to sustain any economically viable recycling programs. PVC's already small market share decreased by 50% over the last ten years. Due to the small number of PVC bottles in circulation, it is uneconomical to develop extensive and costly infrastructure for collecting and recycling PVC.

PVC Recycling is Not Wanted

PVC complicates the recycling process to the point where its minor presence significantly undermines PET (#1 plastics, i.e. soda bottles) recycling. Due to the close resemblance of PVC and PET bottles and the small amount of PVC bottles in the recycling stream contamination readily occurs. Furthermore, at the temperature that PET melts, PVC burns. This ruins the batch of PET and the processing equipment, and undermines the successfully established PET recycling industry.

Consumers: Take Action!
Learn how on Page 2



Attention Shoppers!

What Can I Do?

Educate

- ✓ Become an informed consumer. Learn which products use PVC.
- ✓ Educate your friends and family about the hazards posed by PVC bottles to public health, the environment and the local recycling program.

Act

- ✓ Contact the manufacturers of your favorite products and demand they switch from using PVC.
- ✓ Organize your local government to adopt a resolution discouraging the sale, manufacture, and purchase of PVC bottles in your community. Companies will not switch to non-PVC packaging without pressure from consumers or government action.

Communicate


- ✓ Talk to your local retailer. Insist they work with product manufacturers to discontinue the use of PVC.


So what is packaged in PVC, anyway?

This is a list of some products that may be packaged in PVC bottles

Hair Styling Products
Cooking Oil
Insect Repellent
Maple Syrup
Hand, Body, and Facial Lotions
Hair Oil
Facial Cleanser
Iced Tea
Aloe Vera Gel
Mouthwash
Baby Oil
Tanning Oil
Car Care Products

How do I know if a bottle is PVC?

- Usually it is clear with a vertical seam running down the side of the bottle.
- It will have the  symbol on the bottom. Remember: the chasing arrows symbol does not guarantee the bottle will be recycled or contains recycled content.
- Large bottles will have a handle.
- Some products use a PET bottle with a PVC sleeve. This form of PVC can also damage PET recycling efforts. Contact the product manufacturer for more information.

(Note: PET bottles are also clear, but will have a nib and a  on the bottom instead of the seam. Also, PET bottles will usually have ridged grippers instead of handles.)

Why are PVC bottles used?

When companies decide to use PVC bottles instead of PET or HDPE bottles they are choosing to save pennies over the environment and public health.

What are some other products made from PVC?

Some of the following items are often made in PVC. Ask your retailer for alternatives.

- Credit cards
- Plumbing pipes
- Checkbook covers
- House siding
- Wallpaper
- Shower curtains
- Car interiors



210 N. Bassett Street, Suite 200
Madison, WI 53703
Telephone: 608-255-4800
www.grn.org/pvc