

Frequently Asked Questions

about Recycling Plastic Disposable Bags and Plastic Film

Why is the City no longer accepting single-use plastic bags in its Residential Recycling Program?

Effective July 1, 2015, plastic bags of any color, size or shape, and plastic film CAN NO LONGER be accepted with the City of Bowie's Residential Recycling Program.

The City of Bowie brings the items it collects at curbside for recycling to the Prince George's County Materials Recycling Facility. This facility uses an automated system that sorts and bales the recyclables. Plastic bags jam and clog the machinery causing costly damages and downtime. As a result, Prince George's County has passed a law prohibiting the inclusion of plastic bags and sheeting with your curbside recycling and the facility has banned plastic bags and sheeting from being included with single stream recycling loads.

Instead, please recycle your clean and dry plastic bags at most grocery stores and other retailers rather than placing them in your recycling bin or cart. Use reusable bags or totes when shopping or opt for paper bags where available.

What types of plastic bags/film are considered unacceptable for the City of Bowie's Residential Recycling Program?

Plastic bags / plastic film of any kind are no longer accepted. Specifically, the items contained on the list below WILL NO LONGER be accepted with the City's Residential Recycling Program. Many of them can be recycled instead at local retailers.

Here's what NOT to put in your recycling bin or cart



Any grocery, retail or trash plastic bag

Bread bags

Dry cleaning bags

Fruit and vegetable bags (fresh/frozen)

Garden product bags (soil/mulch)

Newspaper bags

Outer wrap from paper towel, napkin and diaper packages

Outer wrap from cases of soda, juice and snacks

Zipper or stand-up pouches, bubble or cling wrap

Crinkle bags for cereal, pasta or snack bags

Outer wrap from meat or cheese products

I notice the ban includes bags for vegetables, newspaper sleeves, dry-cleaning bags and outer wrap from meat and cheese products. Why are they also banned from the Residential Recycling Program?

These items are banned because they also pose a problem with the sorting process.

What types of plastic bags can I recycle at stores?

Most clean and dry plastic bags are 100 percent recyclable at participating retail locations. These bags are usually designated with the three recycling arrows and are made of vinyl or polyvinyl chloride (PVC). They may also contain one of the following symbols:

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Resin Code	Characteristics and Examples
	<p>LDPE - Low Density Polyethylene (unpigmented films have high clarity, moderate stretch & strength characteristics)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bags (e.g., thicker newspaper bags, bread bags)• Bubble wrap (may also contain nylon) <p>Note: Bubble wrap recycling can be difficult without local markets due to shipping constraints.</p>
	<p>LLDPE - Linear Low Density Polyethylene (unpigmented films have moderate clarity, slightly tacky feel to the touch)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bags (e.g. clear, thin newspaper bags)• Dry cleaning film
	<p>MDPE - Medium Density Polyethylene (unpigmented films have moderate clarity, poor stretch and strength characteristics)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consumer paper packaging (i.e. toilet paper, paper towel) <p>Note: MDPE is a variation on the production of LDPE and is often labeled #4. It's generally used as an alternative to other resins in film applications where strength is not required.</p>
	<p>HDPE - High Density Polyethylene (unpigmented films have some opacity, crinkle to the touch, low stretch, can tear easily, high strength)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most grocery bags• T-shirt bags• Bags with sealed air for packaging (e.g., air cushion)

The following types of plastics/bags **are accepted** at most local store drop-off centers:

1. Newspaper and dry cleaning covering
2. Retail and produce bags (grocery bags, other plastic bags labeled with #2 or #4 etc.)
3. Product wraps (paper towels, water bottles, diapers, toilet tissue etc.)
4. Bread bags and food storage (Ziploc-type) bags

The following types of plastics/bags **are not accepted** for recycling at most local store drop-off centers:

1. Degradable/compostable film or bags
2. Frozen food bags
3. Prewashed salad mix bags
4. Plastic wrap (Cling Wrap/Saran Wrap)

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Can black, dark green or any other color of large plastic bags be placed in the recycling cart or bin? Can these bags be used for recycling?

No, these types of bags are not accepted with the City of Bowie's Residential Recycling Program and are not an acceptable item to place or use to line the recycling collection container. (Nor can they be used for yard waste.)

What will happen if I put plastic bags in my recycling cart after the ban takes place?

After July 1, 2015, City crews will not empty recycling carts or bins that contain plastic bags or plastic film and will tag unacceptable containers with a bright orange sticker. We encourage residents to comply with the ban to keep the City of Bowie moving forward with its recycling and waste diversion goals.

Where can I recycle plastic bags?

Return to sender! Most local grocery stores and other retailers have plastic bag recycling collection programs and have placed collection boxes in their stores that are usually located at or near a store's main entrance. In Bowie, we have found plastic bag /film recycling drop-off stations at Best Buy, Giant, Home Depot, Lowe's, Macy's, Mom's Organic Market, Safeway, Target, and Walmart. You can also visit <http://plasticfilmrecycling.org> and enter your Zip Code to find establishments that accept plastic bags and sheeting for recycling.

What happens to bags after they are recycled properly?

Plastic bags are recycled into many different products. Most plastic bags are turned into composite lumber. They can also be reprocessed and turned into small pellets used to make new bags, pallets, containers, crates, and pipe.

Where can I get reusable shopping bags?

Most grocery, pharmacy and other retailers sell reusable bags for a nominal fee. You can help the environment by using and purchasing reusable bags when shopping or opting for paper bags where available.

Should I recycle degradable bags?

No. Biodegradable/compostable bags should not be placed in the City of Bowie's Residential Recycling Program because these types of bags are made from a different type of material; they break down over time and are not acceptable for recycling purposes. They must be disposed of with household waste.

Who do I contact for more information about the City of Bowie's Residential Recycling Program?

Please call the City of Bowie Public Works Department at 301-809-2344 for more information about Bowie's Residential Recycling Program or visit www.cityofbowie.org/recycling.

Can I recycle at a store if:

- The plastic is colored? YES. Colored material is not a problem for recycling.
- If it tears like paper? NO. This type of plastic is currently not accepted in bag recycling drop-off bins.
- If it crinkles loudly like candy wrappers, flower bouquet wrap or chip bags when I mash it in my hand? NO. Please do not include, as it is not currently acceptable for recycling.
- If it has labels or tape? YES, but labels, tape, and adhesive strips SHOULD BE REMOVED prior to putting it in the recycling drop-off bin. The integrity of the bag isn't important—the recycler just wants the clean plastic.
- If it is thicker, stiff plastic like pet food bags or bedding bags (including anything with a zipper)? NO. These are not the same type of plastic that recyclers want, so DO NOT include.
- It is silvery or metallic (like some snack packaging or printer ink cartridge packages)? NO. This material is not acceptable.
- If it says it's degradable or compostable AND recyclable? NO. Currently, these bags cannot be placed in drop-off bins. The recyclers reprocessing bags don't want the products they are making to degrade over time so these bags are not acceptable.
- It is dirty, has crumbs, or is wet? NO. Recyclers need the bags and film to be CLEAN and DRY. Please don't include dirty or wet bags, or any material that has food or other residues. If in doubt, throw it out!