

PLASTIC BAGS & DEPOTS: A RECYCLING MATCH

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Plastic bag recycling in the Multi-Material BC (MMBC) residential packaging and printed paper recycling program is a frequent topic for resident questions. We've previously discussed **plastic bags and overwrap**, and **why throwing items that don't belong in the recycling bin can be problematic**, and below we revisit plastic bag recycling.

First, a refresher: The MMBC program accepts different types of plastic bags and overwrap, including **plastic shopping bags, the plastic bag that covers new mattresses, plastic bags for bulk foods or produce, bread bags**, and the **overwrap** on toilet paper and paper towels.

These items are only accepted at depots. This is to ensure that they meet recycling remanufacturers' specifications, and because plastic bags collected at curbsides or through multi-family buildings wrap around machinery and impair the recyclability of containers and other recyclables.

At the depot, staff can ensure that the only bags that are accepted are empty, clean, and dry, and that they are entirely polyethylene (rather than a combination of layers of different types of plastics). While MMBC doesn't use the number surrounded by a triangle or three arrows in the shape of a triangle on packaging—also known as the resin code—to identify if something is accepted in the program (resin codes signify what the material is made of, not its recyclability, as discussed **here**), a good rule of thumb is if a plastic bag has the recycling symbol and the numbers 2 or 4, it is accepted.

Depot staff can also ensure that soft plastics that aren't accepted in the program are not mixed with the plastic bags and overwrap that are accepted. A few examples of the items that depot staff watch out for include **plastic bags that are sold with a product in them and have a zipper lock** (even if they have a resin code 2 or 4), as the zipper and the bag are two different kinds of plastic. **Bags that are sold as products** (for example, for sandwiches) and have a zipper lock are not accepted because they are products, not packaging. The bag and zipper are also different plastics.

Depot staff are also on the lookout for other types of soft plastics, including **stretch wrap; cellophane; stand-up pouches** (used for nuts, soups, sugar, and more); **bubble wrap**; and the **packaging that surrounds cheese, meat, fish, or poultry**. These items contain multiple layers of different kinds of plastics and those layers of plastic are incompatible with the polyethylene recycling process. Depot staff can help ensure that these are excluded from the plastic bags and overwrap they accept, improving the recyclability of the plastic bags and overwrap they collect.

So, because fewer plastic bags are recycled when they are collected from curbsides and multi-family buildings, and because only certain types of plastic bags and overwrap are accepted in the MMBC program, plastic bags are accepted only at depots.