

HOW TO BE A REALLY GREAT RECYCLER: Seven Green and Friendly Tips from Your Coop Plastics Recycling Squad

As concerns about global warming extend across the world, many of us are concerned about the enormous amounts of plastic packaging that we ourselves discard on a daily basis. The Park Slope Food Coop collects recyclable plastics that are not accepted by NYC, but relatively few of our 13,000+ members participate in the Coop's recycling program. The following tips are offered to help more Coop members do their part to stem the tide of trash.

1. First, get the facts. Every issue of the Gazette now carries information about the three upcoming dates for Coop recycling, along with basic information about what to bring. For more detailed information about which plastics are accepted, which aren't, and why, pick up a copy of "Plastics Recycling at the Park Slope Food Coop: Frequently Asked Questions" (a/k/a "the FAQs") at plastics collection times, at www.foodcoop.com, or from the Coop office.

2. Understand that recycling is a work in progress—and that YOU are part of that progress! All plastics brought for recycling must be inspected and sorted to insure that they are clean, dry, and numbered appropriately. While plastics manufacturing is high-tech, capital-intensive, and driven by convenience, plastics recycling is low-tech and labor-intensive—and often far from convenient. Our individual actions add up, and they do make a difference. However, patience is a must—and a sense of humor usually helps!

3. Expect to cooperate with your fellow Coop members. Recycling squad members are not responsible for sorting through your plastics if you are not there to work with them, and all "dumped" plastics (those left anonymously for others to sort through) will be treated as ordinary trash. Cooperative recyclers understand this, and don't try to drop off plastics before collection times—or insist that they have no time to go through the necessary sorting on site. Please also note that each recycling squad has additional storage responsibilities in the back alley and elsewhere at the end of the shift, and reserves the right to refuse plastics that are brought later than the designated collection times. If you are too pressed for time on a given day, please save your plastics for another day when you are more available to cooperate with us.

4. Accept occasional open questions and changes. Just as NYC recycling parameters have changed over time, Coop recycling parameters are also subject to change—as we work with those who accept our plastics collections to streamline communications and procedures. There are also times when recycling squad members need to make judgment calls about particular items. Our squad leaders and overall squad coordinator work together between shifts to clarify and minimize any points of ambiguity or confusion. Here again, your cooperation and understanding are essential to the success of this effort.

5. Be alert when working on regular receiving squads. "Internal plastics"—plastic film collected on regular receiving shifts—account for a significant portion of our recyclable plastics. Internal plastics are bagged and stored in the back alley, and removed regularly by our recycling squad drivers, but their points of collection cannot be overseen by our recycling squad. If you are working a receiving shift, please don't mix any plastic containers (even recyclable ones!), vinyl, Styrofoam, cellophane, or mylar with this plastic film—any of these will turn the collection into trash.

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6. Reduce and reuse as well as recycle. In addition to what may seem obvious, a number of Coop members have reduced their use of plastic bags, and/or their purchase of items packaged in unrecyclable plastic. Heightened awareness is the key to building a broader movement for environmental protection—beginning with the power of our individual consumer choices.

7. Don't beat us—JOIN us! If you have questions, suggestions or concerns about recycling procedures, please write to us at plasticrecycling@foodcoop.com so that we can address them directly. (Letters to the Gazette are fine, but direct contact with our Squad Coordinator is more efficient and effective.) If you would like to do more in being part of the solution, sign up as a potential future recycling squad member! We are especially in need of drivers with large-capacity vehicles. The more Coop members participate in our monthly collections, the more we will be able to expand regular recycling hours on a monthly and weekly basis.