

Amount and Proportions of Plastics Recycled in the State of Florida

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Summary:

The State of Florida produces more plastic waste than the current recycling system can process. As the amount of plastic has increased, Florida's recycling rate has gone down, despite increasing initiatives to improve recycling.

Florida recycles only 8% of total plastic waste¹

- Florida generates 65.1 pounds of plastic trash per capita per year, making it the third highest generator of plastic waste in the nation.¹
- Despite being one of the top generators of plastic waste, Florida's plastic recycling rate ranks 34 of 50. Florida only recycles an estimated 5.0 lbs/capita of plastic annually.¹
- In 2020, only about 7% of plastic bottles were recycled.²

Florida cannot approach the state's 75% recycling goal without fudging the numbers

- In 2008, the Florida Legislature established a statewide weight-based goal 75% recycling of waste by 2020. Two years later, Senator Lee Constantine sponsored a law that expanded the state's recycling goal to 75% of all garbage.⁴
- The recycling rate of the state of Florida has been declining since 2016.⁵
- As of December 2019, an estimated 49% of waste was recycled, indicating that the 75% recycling goal has not been met.⁵ Plastic makes up a minute component of recycled waste.
- Florida's reported 49% recycling rate is artificially inflated by inclusion of disposal methods that are not recycling:
 - garbage that is incinerated to generate energy.⁴
 - yard waste dumped in a land fill that has a system for capturing methane from decomposition.⁴

If only traditional materials were considered, such as cardboard boxes, paper, plastic water bottles, cans, and glass jars, Florida's recycling would appear much grimmer.⁴

Plastic is difficult to recycle anywhere in the United States

- 75.5% of plastic generated in the United States is landfilled, six times more than the amount of plastic that is recycled.⁸
 - Once plastic enters these landfills, it does not disappear as most plastics are not biodegradable.⁹
- PET #1 and HDPE #2 plastic bottles are the only types of plastic that are truly recyclable in the United States.
 - Many full body shrink sleeves on these products make them non-recyclable.
- Single-use plastic food service and convenient products cannot be claimed as recyclable in the United States.

Existing programs to increase plastic recycling in Florida don't help much

- Single Stream Recycling (SSR) Program:
 - More than twenty counties have switched their recycling program from dual stream recycling (DSR) to SSR.⁷
 - SSR increases efficiency of the collection process, however, leads to cross contamination before reaching material recovery facilities.⁷

- 30% of materials collected at curbside and sent to Florida recycling facilities cannot be recycled, plastic bags and film are major contributors to this percentage.⁶
- Cross contamination increases recycling costs and reduces the amount of recyclable material. Eliminating the 30% of contaminated materials in curbside recycling bins would save \$100 million in recycling costs in one year.⁶
- W.R.A.P. (Wrap Recycling Action Program)
 - Nationwide initiative promoting retail takeback of plastic film.⁶
 - Pilot campaign launched in January 2019 in nine Florida counties: Alachua, Duval, Escambia, Indian River, Leon, Miami-Dade, Orange, Palm Beach, and Seminole.⁶
 - This program increases plastic recycling just a little by adding one item to the few plastic materials that can be recycled in Florida.

Works Cited

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