



The Association of
Plastic Recyclers

News Release

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Contact: Jennifer Killinger (202) 249-6619

Email: jennifer_killinger@americanchemistry.com

Contact: Steve Alexander (202) 316-3046

Email: salexander@cmrgroup4.com

PLASTIC BOTTLE RECYCLING DIPS IN 2016; LONGTERM OUTLOOK STILL STRONG

WASHINGTON (November 7, 2017)—Plastic bottle recycling remained strong but declined slightly in 2016, slipping 2.4 percent to just over 2.9 billion pounds, according to figures released jointly today by the [Association of Plastic Recyclers](#) (APR) and the [American Chemistry Council](#) (ACC). The 27th annual [National Postconsumer Plastic Bottle Recycling Report](#) indicates the overall recycling rate for plastic bottles for the year was 29.7 percent, down from 31.1 percent in 2015.

The five-year compounded annual growth rate for plastic bottle recycling was 2.1 percent.

Following more than 20 consecutive years of growth, factors that contributed to the recent decline included a slight drop in material collected for recycling, changing export markets, and increased contamination of recyclables. In addition, growth in the use of plastic bottles in packaging was offset by continuing progress in lightweighting and increased use of concentrates with smaller, lighter bottles.

In 2016, polyethylene terephthalate (PET, #1) recycling decreased by 44 million pounds. The collection of high density polyethylene (HDPE, #2) bottles, which includes bottles for milk, household cleaners and detergents, fell by 31.7 million pounds (2.8 percent) to just over 1.1 billion pounds for the year. The recycling rate for HDPE bottles slipped from 34.4 percent to 33.4 percent.

Exports of HDPE bottles rose nearly 5 percent from 184 million pounds in 2015 to 193 million pounds (or 16.4 percent of total HDPE bottles collected) in 2016. The amount of HDPE reported processed in the United States fell by 37 million pounds (or nearly 4 percent) to just under 993 million pounds.

“Some U.S. recyclers are seeing these short-term challenges as opportunities to innovate and invest in our plastics recycling infrastructure,” said Steve Alexander, president of APR. “The key to continued growth lies in improving our sorting and collection technologies to deliver consistent, high quality yields that strengthen our global competitiveness.”

“Plastics recycling has a track record of long-term growth spanning 25 years,” said Steve Russell, ACC’s vice president of plastics. “Post-use plastics are valuable materials that have weathered

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many cycles and different growth factors. From resin suppliers to recyclers to brand owners, the plastics value chain is working together to continue to create new opportunities and long-term solutions.”

This year’s survey found the collection of polypropylene (PP, #5) bottles rose nearly 15.3 percent to reach 36.6 million pounds, as the PP collection rate climbed to over 20 percent. PP caps, closures and non-bottle containers are widely collected for recycling in the United States, and these data are presented in a separate report on recycling non-bottle rigid plastics, which will be released in the coming months (until then see “[2015 Rigids Recycling Report](#)”).

Together, PET and HDPE bottles make up 97.1 percent of the U.S. market for plastic bottles with PP comprising 1.8 percent, LDPE 0.7 percent and PVC 0.3 percent.

Data on PET recycling referenced in the report were separately funded and published by APR and the National Association for PET Container Resources. A separate report, entitled [Report on PET Container Recycling Activity in 2016](#), is available on APR’s website.

The 2016 United States National Postconsumer Plastic Bottle Recycling Report is based on a survey of reclaimers conducted by More Recycling, formerly Moore Recycling Associates, Inc.

The APR will host a *2016 National Postconsumer Plastics Bottle Recycling Rate Report Overview* webinar on Tuesday, November 7th, 2017 from 1-2 pm EST. Details and registration links are available at <https://www.plasticsrecycling.org/markets/web-seminars>.

Additional information is available at www.recycleyourplastics.org and www.plasticsrecycling.org.

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The Association of Plastic Recyclers (APR) is The Voice of Plastics Recycling®. As the international trade association representing the plastics recycling industry, membership includes independent recycling companies of all sizes, processing numerous resins, as well as consumer product companies, equipment manufacturers, testing laboratories, organizations, and others committed to the success of plastics recycling. APR advocates the recycling of all plastics. Visit www.plasticsrecycling.org for more information.

*The American Chemistry Council’s Plastics Division represents leading companies dedicated to providing innovative solutions to the challenges of today and tomorrow through plastics. Ongoing innovations from **America’s Plastics Makers™** have led to medical advances and safety equipment that make our lives better, healthier and safer every day. And advances in plastics are helping Americans save energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and decrease waste. Because plastics are such a valuable resource, the Plastics Division is leading efforts to “reduce, reuse, recycle and recover,” including through outreach, education and access to advances in recycling technology. More at: www.americanchemistry.com/plastics.*

