



The Association of
Plastic Recyclers

News Release

For Immediate Release

November 2, 2016

Contact: Jennifer Killinger (202) 249-6619

Email: jennifer_killinger@americanchemistry.com

Contact: Steve Alexander (202) 316-3046

Email: salexander@cmrgroup4.com

PLASTIC BOTTLE RECYCLING IN U.S. STAYS FLAT IN 2015, DOMESTIC PROCESSING REACHES NEW HIGH

WASHINGTON (November 2, 2016)—Plastic bottle recycling held nearly steady in 2015, with a slight decrease of 0.5 percent from 2014, according to figures released jointly today by the Association of Plastic Recyclers (APR) and the American Chemistry Council (ACC). The 26th annual [National Post-Consumer Plastics Bottle Recycling Report](#) indicates the overall recycling rate for plastic bottles for the year was 31.1 percent, down slightly from 31.7 percent the previous year.

Since 2010 plastic bottle recycling has grown by nearly 400 million pounds, increasing on average by nearly 80 million pounds per year, or 2.9 percent annually.

Following 25 consecutive years of growth, several factors contributed to the recent plateau, including a drop in material collected available for recycling, reduced exports and increased contamination of recyclables. In addition, use of plastic bottles in packaging applications continued to expand but was offset by lightweighting and increased use of concentrates with smaller, lighter bottles.

In 2015, polyethylene terephthalate (PET, #1) recycling decreased by 15 million pounds. The collection of high density polyethylene (HDPE, #2) bottles, which includes bottles for milk, household cleaners and detergents, dipped slightly (0.4 percent or 4.8 million pounds), but overall held steady at just over 1.1 billion pounds for the year. The recycling rate for HDPE bottles slipped (0.4 percent) to 34.4 percent.

Domestic processing of recycled HDPE continued to grow for the fifth consecutive year. Domestic reclaimers processed over 1 billion pounds in 2015, an increase of 4.4 percent. Total domestic capacity to process postconsumer HDPE grew to 1.46 billion pounds with reclaimers continuing to use assets to process non-bottle HDPE and PP.

Exports of HDPE fell 16 percent to 184 million pounds while imports rose by 25 percent to nearly 66 million pounds. Given steady domestic collection, these trends resulted in U.S. reclamation plants purchasing nearly 44 million pounds in additional material. Domestic reclaimers purchased over 1 billion pounds of postconsumer HDPE for the year.

—more—



“The plastics recycling industry has a history of growth that spans a quarter century and has weathered many factors,” said Steve Alexander, executive director of APR. “As a result of expanded infrastructure and demand, this industry remains well positioned for long-term growth.”

“All of us should remain diligent in recycling our plastics,” said Steve Russell, ACC’s vice president of plastics. “Putting the right materials into the bin helps make processing more efficient, which supports the long-term growth and stability of plastics recycling.”

This year’s survey also found the collection of polypropylene (PP, #5) bottles rose nearly 20 percent to reach 32 million pounds, as the PP collection rate climbed to nearly 18 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 “[2014 Rigids Recycling Report](#)”).

Together, PET and HDPE bottles make up 97 percent of the U.S. market for plastic bottles with PP comprising 1.8 percent, LDPE 0.8 percent and PVC 0.3 percent.

The 2015 Report reflects minor corrections in methodology for PP and HDPE in 2104 and 2015. Details on the corrections are provided in the introduction.

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 2015](#), is available on APR’s website.

The 2015 United States [National Postconsumer Plastic Bottle Recycling Report](#) is based on a survey of reclaimers conducted by Moore Recycling Associates, Inc.

Resources for municipal recyclers are available at www.recycleyourplastics.org and www.plasticsrecycling.org. An informational webinar about the report will be held Monday, November 7th at 1:00 pm EST. [Please click here to register now](#) or visit the [APR Web Seminar page](#).

###

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.

