MYTH VS. FACT

RECYCLING

Industry, government and consumers have worked together for decades to improve and increase plastic recycling, with the goal of better reusing this valuable resource and keeping plastics out of the environment. However, while misconceptions remain about recycling, a careful review of the facts shows recycling is an effective solution that also spurs economic growth and creates new jobs.

MYTH

"Plastic bags aren't recyclable."

FACT

Plastic bags are reusable AND recyclable.

- Plastic bags are recyclable, and in most cases are already reused and recycled by consumers.
- Many grocery chains in the United States have drop-off bin programs that reuse single-use plastic bags.
- A study by Moore Recycling Associates found that over 90 percent of the U.S. population living in cities with a population of over 125,000 has access to these types of recycling systems already.[1]

MYTH

"Traditional recycling is the industry's only solution—and it's not enough."

FACT

Many types of recycling address plastic waste.

- Advanced recycling solutions available today ensure that some plastics can be endlessly recycled.[2]
- Chemical recycling, pyrolysis and gasification break down polymers into their original molecules, or monomers.
- Advanced recycling solutions can even generate more recycled content to better serve communities and businesses by repurposing hard-to-recycle products.
- Agilyx,[3] an alternative energy company, recycles polystyrene[4] (which most people know as Styrofoam™) into high-value petrochemicals. Agilyx's polystyrene recycling process creates like-new materials while generating fewer greenhouse gases than manufacturing does.

MYTH

"The plastics industry isn't making recycling better or easier."

FACT

Industry is a vital partner in developing recycling solutions.

- The U.S. plastics industry is a global leader in innovative recycling solutions and circular economy partnerships.
- The U.S. industry's leadership in infrastructure investment will continue to improve global waste management and further work to create a circular economy.

MYTH

"Recycled plastic is weaker and less durable."

FACT

Recycled plastic is strong, durable, lightweight and easy to mold."

- Plastics have all the key properties necessary[5] for use as heavy-duty materials. When recycled, plastic bags can be made into plastic lumber that is used to make park benches, backyard decks and fences – even playground equipment.
- The New End Market Opportunities (NEMO) for Film Asphalt Project is a unique example of the unique cradle to cradle lifecycle plastics can have, repurposing[6] plastic retail bags to pave parking lots.
- NEMO incorporates recycled polyethylene (rPE) into the formulation of hot asphalt using a "dry process where rPE is a solid additive during the asphalt mixture manufacturing process – resulting in a final product that offers many of the same benefits of traditional polymer-modified asphalt, including improved performance and lifespan, all at a decreased cost.

MYTH

"Recycling rates are falling."

FACT

Recycling rates are rising thanks to industry leadership.

- Recycling rates continue to grow despite increased consumer demand for harder-to-recycle products.
- According to the U.S. EPA, the U.S. recycling rate for PET plastics, which package many of our food and beverages, including plastics bottles, increased from 2 percent in the 1980s to more than 24 percent in 2018.[7]
- Initiatives like the Every Bottle Back campaign help raise awareness and increase education about how consumers can better recycle plastic.

MYTH

"Recycling does not contribute to local economies."

FACT

Recycling drives local economic growth and emissions reductions.

- Recycling benefits local economies by reducing greenhouse gases, creating new jobs and returning materials to manufacturers – which further reduces waste – that can more than cover the cost of collecting and processing recyclables.
- For example, recycling in Minnesota supports 60,000 jobs, accounts for nearly $3.4 billion in wages, and adds about $15.7 billion to the state's economy.[8]
- Reducing consumption of non-recyclable products and ensuring that products are properly recycled will increase the buy-in for recycling systems that will add to the economy.

1 https://www.plasticfilmrecycling.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Recycling-Reach-Study-2012.pdf

2 https://www.closedlooppartners.com/advanced-recycling-investor-roadmap/

3 https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/plastics-material-specific-data#:~:text=In%202017%2C%20plastics%20generation%20was,13.2%20percent%20of%20MSW%20generation.&text=While%20overall%20the%20amount%20of,plastic%20containers%20is%20more%20significant

4 https://recyclingpartnership.org/recycling-101/

5 https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200819-why-plastic-waste-is-an-ideal-building-material

6 https://www.plasticsindustry.org/article/plastics-and-lyondellbasell-collaborate-first-paving-project-using-recycled-plastic

7 https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/plastics-material-specific-data#:~:text=In%202017%2C%20plastics%20generation%20was,13.2%20percent%20of%20MSW%20generation.&text=While%20overall%20the%20amount%20of,plastic%20containers%20is%20more%20significant

8 https://recyclingpartnership.org/recycling-101/