

Plastic Container Recycling in the Carolinas

Economic Impact Significant ...

While many businesses in the Carolinas are involved in plastic container recycling, information gathered from 15 representative companies show the economic impact of the industry. These companies:

- employ nearly 1,350 individuals;
- process more than 750 million pounds of plastic containers annually;
- had annual sales of nearly \$450 million in the past year; and
- have spent more than \$126 million in initial investments and facility expansions.

The companies are: Clear Path Recycling; Custom Polymers; DAK Americas; David C. Poole Company; Envision Plastics; EZ Products; Faith Groups; GGT Footing/ Polysols; Mohawk Industries; NURRC; Palmetto Synthetics; PolyQuest Inc.; Stein Fibers Ltd./Innovative; USFibers; and Wellman Plastics Recycling.



CAROLINAS
**PLASTICS
RECYCLING**
COUNCIL

The Carolinas Plastics Recycling Council is a partnership of recycling companies and other stakeholders dedicated to increased recovery.

Plastics – particularly plastic containers – are an essential part of our daily lives.

Products made from plastic are everywhere and include beverage and food containers, detergent and shampoo bottles, computers and cell phones, furniture and toys as well as television and car parts. Given such widespread use, it may not be surprising that plastic comprised more than 12 percent (about 31 million tons) of the nation's municipal solid waste in 2010 according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Of that amount, about 8 percent (2.6 million tons) was recycled.

More specifically, more than 5.3 million plastic containers were generated in 2010 according to the EPA. Of that amount, about 25 percent (about 1.3 million tons) was recycled.

It's clear that many more plastic containers can be recycled. And there are companies in both North Carolina and South Carolina that need the material.

Increased recycling pays dividends.

Recycling plastic containers has many benefits including reducing oil consumption, saving energy and decreasing the need to build landfills or incinerators. While the environmental benefits of recycling are well known, what is less known are the significant economic benefits.

By turning waste into valuable raw materials, recycling creates jobs, builds more competitive manufacturing industries and adds significantly to the region's economy. Recycling also helps avoid disposal costs and potentially generate revenue from the sale of material.

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Did you know?

The Carolinas have robust plastics recycling markets that need more material.

By the Numbers ...

- North Carolina recycled 36,046 tons of plastic in 2011 – about a 27 percent recovery rate. Of that, 22,160 tons were PET and 12,002 tons were HDPE.
- South Carolina recycled 17,673 tons of plastic in fiscal year (FY) 2011 (July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011). On average, each South Carolinian recycled 7.6 pounds of plastic.

Good News in the Carolinas ...

The Carolinas are fortunate to have a strong plastics recycling industry that provides readily available markets for the region. (See column on left.) These companies accept a wide variety of plastics from both residential and industrial sources and process them into feedstock for new products – ranging from food and beverage containers to carpet, textiles and automotive parts. As a result of these operations, jobs are provided, investments are made and other economic benefits (e.g., taxes are paid, related industries are supported) are realized.

There's much more to be done.

The companies that recycle plastics in the Carolinas are not operating at maximum capacity. They are capable of processing more material – which may result in increased job creation and additional investment. If each of these companies operated at maximum capacity, the economic benefits could be significant with increased local jobs, tax revenues and sustainable enterprises.

Plastics recyclers in the Carolinas estimate that about 25 percent of the material that they currently process comes from the two states. That means that a lot of plastic is being imported into the Carolinas for recycling. It also may indicate that some of the material recovered in the Carolinas is exported to recyclers in other states. Recovering and keeping that material at home saves on transportation costs as well as generates tertiary economic activity.

What can local decision makers do?

There are many steps that local decision makers can take to support plastic recycling in the Carolinas. Here are a few suggestions.

- Understand that plastic container recycling has economic and environmental benefits in the Carolinas.
- Direct recovered plastic containers to recyclers in the Carolinas to support the local economy.
- Fund and support local recycling programs with appropriate resources.
- Make sure that local recycling programs include as many types of plastic containers as possible.
- Lead by example. Set up plastic container recycling programs in government buildings.

Did you know?

Plastic bottle caps can be recycled. Generally, caps are made of HDPE and PP – both of which have high market demand.



Lost Potential ...

About 300 million plastic containers are disposed of in the Carolinas every year. These bottles represent lost feedstock to local plastics recyclers and lost revenue to local governments and others from the sale of this material.

In North Carolina, it is estimated that about 95,377 tons of plastic containers were disposed of at a total lost value of more than \$40 million.

It is estimated that in South Carolina nearly 33,000 tons of plastic containers were disposed of in FY11. As a result, more than \$12 million in potential revenue from the sale of this material was lost.



South Carolina
Department of Commerce



The Carolinas Plastics Recycling Council is a partnership of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling, the S.C. Department of Commerce's Recycling Market Development Program as well as representatives from the plastics recycling industry.