

Why Don't We Recycle More Plastic?

by Drew Schwartz

According to the IAPD Environmental Statement, "We believe plastics offer unique opportunities to reduce, reuse and recycle, thereby minimizing our environmental impact." Yet only about two-thirds of the respondents to the 2012 IAPD Environmental Survey quantified the amount of plastic remnants they recycle. If those respondents didn't disclose recycling weights, it could be that 1) they didn't calculate the figures; 2) they weren't proud of their numbers; or 3) they didn't recycle at all.

With all the benefits to recycling, such as recouping value from something you would throw away anyway, being a more responsible steward of the environment and helping to promote the "greenness" of plastics, I was left to wonder: Why wouldn't some IAPD members recycle plastic and why don't the rest recycle more?

An online search posing the question, "Why don't we recycle more?" resulted in a variety of articles. A number of these articles narrowed their answers down to these five reasons:

1. It's too time consuming.
2. I don't have enough space.
3. I don't get paid for doing it.
4. It doesn't make any difference to the environment.
5. I don't have all the information I need for matching materials with recyclers.

I worked through these reasons none by one and came up with the following realizations:

1. I think in most cases "too time consuming" relates to the time it takes to set up a program. IAPD has a good resource available for reducing this amount of setup time in the "What to Look for When Selecting a Plastics Recycler" section of IAPD's *Environmental Guidelines* at www.iapd.org.
2. It takes less space to start with a single type, or unsorted types, than it does to go across the board and recycle every type of plastic you sell. There are recyclers out there who will give you a price for unsorted materials. Any member of the IAPD Environmental Committee (www.iapd.org/about_iapd/committees.cfm), can point you in the right direction here.
3. Recyclers and scrap dealers are calling us week in and week out. They are paying money for scrap. This trend will continue. If you need a list of these businesses in your area, try www.recyclingcentral.com.

4. Of course it makes a difference to the environment, and to our ability to recruit and retain the next generation of employees. Plus every pound of durable plastic that is kept out of the landfill and turned back into usable product is many pounds of natural gas or coal or petroleum that can be conserved for use in the future.
5. Matching materials with recyclers is a less of problem for beginners than "I don't have enough space." Unless you have large amounts of space, you will probably begin recycling with one or two or three types of materials. The selection of these types of materials will come from the recycler you select based on other factors, such as how much that recycler pays and what sort of minimum pickup amount they will accept.

So, for those of you IAPD member firms

with no recycling programs, or very limited ones, please get going. The IAPD Environmental Committee would be pleased to give one, or more, of our 2013 IAPD Environmental Awards to a smaller distributor or a manufacturer with a new program.

And for those of you with recycling programs underway, you know that the most difficult stage of your implementation is over. I would encourage you experienced recyclers to reach out to members of the Environmental Committee for mentors (or for students willing to learn from your experience, as the case may be) so that we can all recycle more plastic.

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