

Putnam Challenges Residents Over Plastic 'Film' Recycling

Health department officials have launched a recycling challenge and local retailers are in on the event.

By Lanning Taliaferro, Patch Staff

Oct 22, 2019 1:05 pm ET

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Lesliann Piraino and the health department kick-off the #PutnamRecycles challenge at Kohl's in Brewster. (Putnam County Health Department)
From the Putnam County Department of Health

Are you recycling all that you can? Leading up to America Recycles Day on November 15, The Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH) has launched a plastic "film" recycling challenge. Plastic film consists of flexible polyethylene packaging such as grocery bags and bread bags. It is also the wrap around many products including bathroom tissue, diapers, and more. Plastics such as these, commonly considered single-use, unnecessarily head to landfills. They can instead be dropped off at specified locations to be recycled.

To join the challenge, head to a drop-off location in Putnam to recycle plastic bags or film and share a photo online with the hashtag #PutnamRecycles.

"Because they are not part of curbside pickup, plastic bags and plastic film are often forgotten about when we talk about recycling. Many people are unaware that the plastic wrap surrounding their paper towel rolls is actually recyclable. Recycling these plastics has positive environmental and economic impacts, and it can be as simple as bringing the bags back to the store with you on your next visit," says County Executive MaryEllen Odell.

"The health department works in partnership with every retailer in the county that is required to accept plastic bags and films. Currently there are more than 20 drop-off locations throughout Putnam," says Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD.

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Home Depot, Acme, and Kohl's in Brewster, Acme in Mahopac, and Foodtown in Cold Spring are a few participating retailers. All large retail stores, or chains with more than five smaller stores, must participate. A complete list is posted online at the [PCDOH website](#).

"It takes up to 500 years for plastic items to decompose in landfills," adds Dr. Nesheiwat. "And many plastics never decompose completely—they just break down into smaller and smaller pieces. Daily we may not witness the impact plastics have on human health, but we do know that plastics can pose a danger to animals, especially marine life. We are hoping this recycling challenge calls attention to this important issue."

While many residents in Putnam participate in curbside recycling, recycling today is vastly different from the recycling of the 1990s. The Three R's: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle have since been updated to the Five R's, which now includes Refuse and Rot.

Refuse means not accepting and not purchasing items that will later end up in recycling centers or landfills. While rot refers to food items that can decompose in a compost pile or bin. If consumers regularly follow this motto, they will have less to sort through as they determine what is recyclable and what is trash.

Rinsed plastic containers and glass bottles, cardboard, and food and beverage cans are almost always accepted for curbside recycling. Paper, plastic, or foil with remains of food — think greasy pizza boxes — are not recyclable. Attempting to recycle items that cannot be recycled can contaminate an entire batch of recyclables and actually does more harm than good. Recycling experts have coined this well-intentioned, yet detrimental recycling misstep, "wish-cycling." They urge consumers, "when in doubt, throw it out."

While recycling has some challenges, the environmental impacts of recycling remain true and measurable, from reducing CO2 emissions to conserving natural resources and more.

New York State's ban on plastic bags, set to go into effect March 2020, prohibits retailers from providing customers with single-use plastic bags. While there are some exceptions, including deli meat bags and film, produce bags, and bags for individually delivered newspapers, the ban aims to reduce widespread plastic waste. The ban has an additional component allowing counties to opt in to a 5-cent fee on paper bags; revenue that would go to the state's Environmental Protection Fund as well as a separate fund to buy reusable bags for consumers.

Even after the ban is in place, plastic bag and film drop-off locations will continue to operate. To search for your nearest drop-off location, visit: www.plasticfilmrecycling.org/recycling-bags-and-wraps/find-drop-off-location/.