



The Association of
Plastic Recyclers

News Release

For Immediate Release

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PLASTIC BOTTLE RECYCLING RESILIENT IN FACE OF SHORT-TERM CHALLENGES

5-Year Growth Rate Still Positive Despite Dip in 2017

WASHINGTON (December 17, 2018)—Plastic bottle recycling declined slightly in 2017, slipping 3.6 percent to 2.8 billion pounds, according to figures released jointly today by the [Association of Plastic Recyclers \(APR\)](#) and the [American Chemistry Council \(ACC\)](#). The 28th annual [National Postconsumer Plastic Bottle Recycling Report](#) indicates the overall recycling rate for plastic bottles for the year was 29.3 percent, down 0.4 percentage points from 29.7 percent in 2016. The five-year compounded annual growth rate for plastic bottle recycling was 0.1 percent.

Factors that contributed to the industry challenges included changing export markets and a 3.6 percent drop in material collected for recycling. Ongoing increases in single-stream collection also led to increased contamination of recyclables in the near term. In addition, growth in the use of plastic in bottles was offset by continuing progress in lightweighting and increased use of concentrates with smaller, lighter bottles.

In 2017, polyethylene terephthalate (PET, #1) bottles collected for recycling decreased by 27 million pounds. The collection of high density polyethylene (HDPE, #2) bottles, which includes bottles for milk, household cleaners and detergents, fell by 70.3 million pounds (6.3 percent) to just over 1.0 billion pounds for the year. The recycling rate for HDPE bottles slipped from 33.4 percent to 31.1 percent.

Exports of HDPE bottles fell nearly 28 percent from 193 million pounds to 140 million pounds, or 13.4 percent of total HDPE bottles collected in 2017. The processing of recycled HDPE sourced domestically and imported fell by 31 million pounds in 2017.

“Plastic bottle recycling is proving to be resilient in the face of short-term challenges,” said Steve Alexander, president of APR. “The recycling industry is responding in kind, with some investing in increased U.S. infrastructure, a clear sign of a positive long-term outlook. These investments underscore the need for continued consumer participation and convenient access to recycling programs.”

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“Increasing plastics recycling is a critical part of moving toward a more circular economy, and commitments made across the value chain—from brand owners to plastics makers to recyclers—give us good reason to be optimistic about the long-term prospects for plastics recycling,” said Steve Russell, ACC’s vice president of plastics. “Plastics makers in North America and Europe have committed to recycle or recover all plastic packaging by 2040.”

This year’s survey found the collection of polypropylene (PP, #5) bottles fell 15.2 percent to 31.1 million pounds, as the PP collection rate dropped to 17.2 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 our [2016 Rigids Recycling Report](#)).

Together, PET and HDPE bottles make up 97.0 percent of the U.S. market for plastic bottles with PP comprising 1.9 percent, LDPE 0.7 percent and PVC 0.3 percent. Together, PET and HDPE comprise 98.8 percent of bottles recycled with PP comprising 1.1 percent.

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 2017](#), is available on APR’s website.

The 2017 United States National Postconsumer Plastic Bottle Recycling Report is based on a survey of reclaimers conducted by More Recycling, formerly Moore Recycling.

Additional information is available at www.plasticsrecycling.org and www.recycleyourplastics.org.

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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 (ACC) represents the leading companies engaged in the business of chemistry. ACC members apply the science of chemistry to make innovative products and services that make people's lives better, healthier and safer. ACC is committed to improved environmental, health and safety performance through Responsible Care®; common sense advocacy designed to address major public policy issues; and health and environmental research and product testing. The business of chemistry is a \$526 billion enterprise and a key element of the nation's economy. It is among the largest exporters in the nation, accounting for ten percent of all U.S. goods exports. Chemistry companies are among the largest investors in research and development. Safety and security have always been primary concerns of ACC members, and they have intensified their efforts, working closely with government agencies to improve security and to defend against any threat to the nation's critical infrastructure. <http://www.americanchemistry.com>

