



ASSOCIATION OF PLASTIC
RECYCLERS

SORTING POTENTIAL TEST METHOD:

Evaluation of the Size Sorting Potential for Articles with at Least 2 Dimensions Less than 2 Inches

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Introduction

Scope, Significance, and Use

This test is one in the series of “Sorting Potential Test Methods” developed by the Association of Plastics Recyclers.

The sorting potential test methods describe laboratory-scale representations of the most commonly used collection and Material Recovery Facility (MRF) processes for handling single-stream post consumer recyclables. The test methods assume that these co-mingled recyclables are collected curbside, compacted in a typical recycling collection truck, transported to and processed through an automated MRF into bales of similar plastics, then further processed at the plastics reclaimer in their original form before being reduced in size.

These tests do not consider the plastics recycling process starting from or after size reduction at the plastics reclaimer. Nor do they represent other processes that may use different methods of collection and separation with different results. Furthermore, plastic sorting processes have some degree of variability in commercial practice. It is not the intent of this protocol to model every possible process outcome but to choose a common set of parameters widely employed and which fall squarely within those used in industry.

The sorting potential tests are intended to identify specific design features that may cause an entire package to be lost in the recycling process. The consequences of a plastic article being mis-sorted prior to size reduction are

more significant than in processes that follow size reduction, since the entire package is lost to the plastics recycling stream rather than a mere component of the package. The modeling of sorting behavior in this test enables design engineers to focus their improvement efforts and is designed to complement the wide range of tests offered by APR that form the foundation of APR’s Design Guidance for plastic package recyclability.

One of the first steps in the MRF process is glass removal. This is accomplished by impacting the entire mixed material stream with solid objects. The material then passes over a screen where the broken glass falls through the openings. Items that pass through the screen are processed through the glass system and lost to other material recovery systems. The material retained on the screen proceeds through the rest of the material recovery process. This sorting potential test method simulates the screening process.

The size of the glass screen openings differ between machine manufacturers. The screen openings used in this test method are an average of the four most common manufacturers and therefore, represent the average screen throughout the industry. It is important to note that screens in MRF’s are inundated with material that will support some smaller items that by all rights, should have fallen through the holes. This inefficiency should not be interpreted to mean that the item will be recovered since most plastics recyclers employ similar screens to remove small items heavily laden with contaminants.

This specific size sorting potential test method provides a means of evaluating whether a plastic article will correctly pass over a lab scale average sized glass screen that performs similarly to that used in production facilities. Good results in this screening test indicate that a plastic article has the potential to be sorted well in production conditions. Poor results indicate that an improvement in plastic product design is desirable to promote recovery.

Hazards and Safety Equipment

This test method involves handling, lifting and carrying plastic items.

Disclaimer

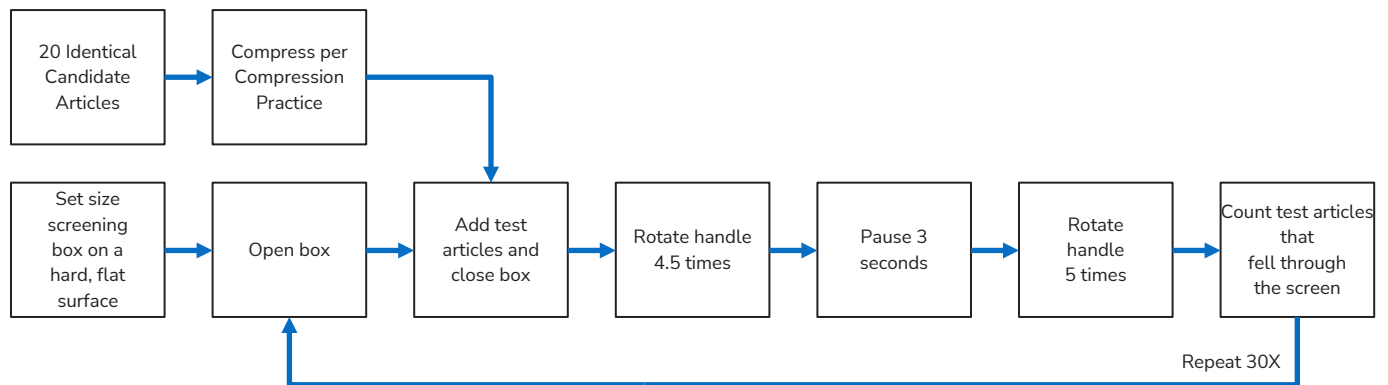
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Reference Documents

- Compression Practice
[SORT-P-00 Practice for Compressing Plastic Articles for Laboratory Evaluation.](#)
- APR Candidate Laboratories for Testing
<https://plasticsrecycling.org/apr-design-hub/testing-protocols-labs/apr-recommended-testing-facilities/>

Test/Method Summary and Flow Diagram

The flow diagram below outlines the test process. 20 test articles are compressed using the APR compression device, then placed into the screening box. The operator then rotates the box handle 5 times, pauses, then another 5 times. He then counts the articles that fell through the screen. This is repeated 30 times with the same test articles to establish repeatable results.



Equipment Required

Bottle compression device built per the instructions found at [SORT-P-00 Practice for Compressing Plastic Articles for Laboratory Evaluation](#).

Size screening box built per the instructions found in annex 1.

Materials and Reagents Required

20 identical candidate test articles provided by the test applicant. These articles should be fully decorated ie with label, closures, etc as if they were placed in a curbside bin after consumer use. Note that these articles are empty, whereas some residual product may remain in the articles found in the actual recycling stream.

Method Steps

ARTICLE PREPARATION

1. Take pictures of all articles for submission including:
 - a. One candidate test article before compression
 - b. All candidate test articles after compression (one collective picture)
2. Obtain 20 empty candidate articles complete with all closures, attachments, and labeling.
3. Compress the candidate articles according to the APR compression practice found at [SORT-P-00 Practice for Compressing Plastic Articles for Laboratory Evaluation](#).

SIZE SCREENING BOX TEST

1. Place the size screening box, constructed per the instructions found in annex 1, on a solid flat surface.



2. Open the screen and place the test articles inside.



3. Close and latch the screen.



4. Rotate the box handle at the approximate rate of one turn per 1 ¼ seconds, 4 ½ turns (stopping so that the screen faces downward).



5. Pause 3 seconds
6. Rotate the box handle at the same rate, 5 turns, stopping so the screen faces downward.
7. Count the test articles that fell from the screen and record the number.
8. Return to step 5 and repeat 29 more times for a total of 30 iterations.

Measurements

For each iteration, record the count of the test articles falling through the screen.

Report Form

Found in Annex 2.

Assessment

If the average capture rate % of items remaining inside the size screening box is:

>= 90%: The candidate article is most likely to be sorted correctly through the glass screening process. Therefore the APR Design Guidance category for the design feature of “size sorting potential” is **APR Design® Preferred**.

>= 51% and <90%: A high percentage of the test articles will be lost during size sorting but most will likely move correctly with the other materials. Therefore the APR Design Guidance category for the design feature “size sorting potential” is **Detrimental to Recycling**.

< 51%: The candidate article will most likely be lost during size sorting. Therefore the APR Design Guidance category for the design feature “optical sorting potential” is **Renders Package Non-Recyclable** per the APR definition of recyclability.

Annex 1: Rotating Screened Box Construction

Materials Required		
Reference	Quantity	Description
1	1	4' x 8' x 3/4" (23/32) B-C or better plywood
2	1	1" x 8" x 8' cellular PVC
3	1 lb	1 5/8" coarse thread drywall screws
4	2	Door hinges (3 1/2" shown in example)
5	1	2" x 3" x 8' framing grade lumber
6	24	#10 x 5/8" flat head wood screws
7	2	galvanized floor flange for 1/2" pipe
8	2	1/2" x 3" galvanized nipple
9	1	1/2" x 6" galvanized nipple
10	1	1/2" x 4 1/2" galvanized nipple
11	2	1/2" galvanized cap
12	1	safety latchpost hasp (3 1/2" shown)
13	2	1/2" galvanized elbow, 90 degrees
14	2	3/4" EMT 2-hole strap

TOOLS REQUIRED

- Circular or panel saw
- Philips screw driver or screw gun
- Miter or hand saw
- 3/4" Dado blade on a table or radial arm saw
- Tape measure
- Chalk line or straight edge
- 2 Channel-lock pliers
- Wood glue
- 1 1/2" stapler or finish nailer

Annex 1: Rotating Screened Box Construction (continued)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Fabricate the Box:

- a. Cut the following pieces from the plywood:
 - 2 sides: 14 1/4" x 18 1/2"
 - 2 ends: 13" x 14 1/4"
 - 1 bottom: 17" x 13"
- b. Assemble and screw together with 1 5/8" screws as shown:



2. Fabricate the Stand:

- a. Cut the following pieces from the plywood:
 - i. 1 bottom: 17" x 19 3/4"
 - ii. 2 sides: 17w" x 16h" with 4" x 4" corners cut as shown:



- b. Assemble and screw together with 1 5/8" screws as shown:



3. Fabricate the screen (Note 8/4/2020 update requires the 1 x 8 to be PVC):

- a. Using the 1 x 8, cut:
 - 6 pieces 1 3/8" x 18 9/16" long
 - 9 pieces 1 3/8" x 14 1/2" long
- b. Set the dado blade to be 3/4" wide and to make a 11/16" deep cut
 - i. Starting at the very end of the 9 pieces, make cross cuts leaving 1.97" between cuts
 - ii. Starting at the very end of the 5 pieces make cross cuts leaving 1.46" between cuts as shown (note that the pictures below represent the process, not the correct number or size of the pieces)



- c. Lay the pieces so the cut slots are facing each other and intertwine. Glue and staple/nail at each connection.

4. Assemble the Screened Box:

- a. With the open end of the box facing up, place the screen on the open end of the box and attach one end of the hinges to the screen and one to the box using the 5/8" screws.



- b. On the opposite side attach the security hasp as shown:



- c. On either end of the box, mark lines from the top corners of the screen to the bottom corners of the box to locate the center. Using the 5/8" screws, mount the floor flanges to the box sides, centering them on the intersection of these lines.

- d. Into one floor flange thread one 3" nipple and a cap.



- e. Into the other floor flange thread a 3" nipple, elbow, 6" nipple, elbow, 4 1/2" nipple, and a cap, tightening and aligning them to create a crank handle as shown.
- f. Set the box onto the stand so that the floor flanges sit between and are centered on the uprights. Attach the nipples to the stand using the 3/4" EMT straps and 1 5/8" screws as shown.



Annex 2: Report Form

SIZE SORTING POTENTIAL OF A WHOLE PLASTIC ARTICLE Record Sheet – APR Test

Background	
Testing Facility	_____
Testing Facility Technician	_____
Date	_____
Candidate Article Description	Volume _____
	Label Material _____
	Closure Material _____
	Body Material _____
	Brand/Description _____

Screen Test of 20 Compressed Items			
	# Items Through Screen	# Items Through Screen	
Test #1	<input type="text"/>	Test #16	<input type="text"/>
Test #2	<input type="text"/>	Test #17	<input type="text"/>
Test #3	<input type="text"/>	Test #18	<input type="text"/>
Test #4	<input type="text"/>	Test #19	<input type="text"/>
Test #5	<input type="text"/>	Test #20	<input type="text"/>
Test #6	<input type="text"/>	Test #21	<input type="text"/>
Test #7	<input type="text"/>	Test #22	<input type="text"/>
Test #8	<input type="text"/>	Test #23	<input type="text"/>
Test #9	<input type="text"/>	Test #24	<input type="text"/>
Test #10	<input type="text"/>	Test #25	<input type="text"/>
Test #11	<input type="text"/>	Test #26	<input type="text"/>
Test #12	<input type="text"/>	Test #27	<input type="text"/>
Test #13	<input type="text"/>	Test #28	<input type="text"/>
Test #14	<input type="text"/>	Test #29	<input type="text"/>
Test #15	<input type="text"/>	Test #30	<input type="text"/>

Average Through Screen

% Recovery
 (20 – average # through screen) / 20) x 100

Assessment		
% Recovery	Applicable APR Recyclability Category for “NIR Sorting Potential” (see category descriptions in APR Design® Guide for Plastics Recyclability Homepage)	Check Applicable Box
>= 90%	APR Design® Preferred	
>= 51% and < 90%	Detrimental to Recycling	
< 51%	Renders Package Non-Recyclable per APR definition	

Testing Facility Technician Signature _____

Comments

What features cause negative results?, What could be done to improve sorting?, etc.

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared by the Association of Plastic Recyclers as a service to the plastic packaging industry to promote the most efficient use of the nation's plastics recycling infrastructure and to enhance the quality and quantity of recycled postconsumer plastics. The information contained herein reflects the input of APR members from a diverse cross-section of the plastics recycling industry, including professionals experienced in the recycling of PET packaging articles. The information in this document is offered without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, including WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, which are expressly disclaimed. APR and its members accept no responsibility for any harm or damages arising from the use of or reliance upon this information by any party. APR intends to update this document periodically to reflect new developments and practices.

Document Version History

<i>Version</i>	<i>Publication Date</i>	<i>Changes Made</i>
1	January 30, 2018	
2	May 15, 2018	
3	August 6, 2020	Changed screen material from wood to PVC to eliminate shrinkage
4	August 30, 2024	Change to Naming Convention (B) to (S) to match Single Purpose Test; Changed hyperlinks to match new website