



Háskólinn  
á Akureyri  
University  
of Akureyri

# Plastics: from Wishcycling to recycling

Audrey Louise Matthews

Ásta Margrét Ásmundsdóttir

# What is Wishcycling?

## NEWS

Science

### Wishcycling: The dos and don'ts of being good at recycling

5 November 2021



COP26



unak.is

### Support the Guardian

Available for everyone, funded by readers

Support us →

The Guardian

Environment ► Climate crisis Wildlife Energy Pollution

Recycling

### Stop 'wishcycling' and get wise: how to recycle (almost) everything



Emma Beddington  
Tue 7 Feb 2023 11:00 CET




## INDEPENDENT

News > UK > Home News

### Wishcycling: What can and can't be recycled under updated rules?

The new policy will see the UK government asking households to be more selective in what they recycle

Eleanor Noyce • Tuesday 30 May 2023 10:57 BST • 3 Comments





# Wishcycling in the UK

- The disposal of consumer waste in a recycle bin with the hope that it will be recycled
- It cannot or is unlikely to be recycled
- It can lead to the contamination of other materials, and may cause the resources to be wasted



# Wishcycling in the UK



## How not to wishcycle

Commonly wishcycled items, why they can't go in recycling and what to do with them instead.

**Wishcycling = putting something in the recycling that can't be recycled.**

Wishcycling at work or home causes contamination, which leads to nearly a fifth of all recycling being wasted.

Share this with customers and colleagues in your business so they know what to avoid putting in the recycling bin.

 <p><b>Drinking glasses</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Will cause imperfections in new glass bottles</p> <p><b>DO</b> Wrap broken glass and safely dispose of in general waste</p>	 <p><b>Soft plastics &amp; film</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Not widely recycled and needs specialist recycling</p> <p><b>DO</b> Take to a supermarket or other collection points</p>	 <p><b>Foil pouches &amp; crisp packets</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Made of metallised plastic which is not recyclable</p> <p><b>DO</b> Dispose of in general waste</p>	 <p><b>Juice boxes &amp; soup cartons</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Made of layered cardboard and plastic which is difficult to separate</p> <p><b>DO</b> Dispose of in general waste or arrange specialist recycling</p>
 <p><b>Plastic toys</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Comprised of hard and moulded plastics that need to be separated</p> <p><b>DO</b> Donate to charity or dispose of in general waste</p>	 <p><b>Wet cardboard</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Soggy boxes clog up the machinery during automated sorting of mixed recycling</p> <p><b>DO</b> Add to compost or dispose of in general waste</p>	 <p><b>Toothpaste tubes</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Contaminated with residue which affects the quality of recycled material</p> <p><b>DO</b> Dispose of in general waste</p>	 <p><b>Glass cookware</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Tempered to withstand high temperature and therefore not easily broken down</p> <p><b>DO</b> Donate to charity</p>
 <p><b>Dirty takeaway containers</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Food residue make them unrecyclable</p> <p><b>DO</b> Dispose of in general waste</p>	 <p><b>Tissues &amp; paper towels</b></p> <p><b>WHY NOT</b> Easily contaminated and can clog up machinery</p> <p><b>DO</b> Dispose of in general waste</p>	 <p>For more information visit <a href="https://www.biffa.co.uk/wishcycling">Biffa.co.uk/wishcycling</a></p>	





Háskólinn  
á Akureyri  
University  
of Akureyri

72% of Brits admit to “wishcycling”

Legislation and Regulation, Collection and Transport, Sustainability, Treatment and Recovery

19th July 2023

unak.is



# Study – Background in Iceland

- Is wishcycling an issue in Iceland?
- Statistics Iceland
- Umhverfisstofnun
- Akureyrarbær
- Áhugahópur um endurvinnslu og endurnýtingu FB group

## Plastic packaging



Only packaging can be recycled.  
It is important to rinse the packaging  
and remove all paper from it.

### **Plastic packaging include:**

- Plastic bags
- Plastic cups e.g. yogurt cups
- Plastic wrappings, clear and coloured
- Plastic wrappings e.g. wrappings from candies and crackers
- Plastic trays
- Plastic containers e.g. bottles for shampoo
- Styrofoam containers
- Snack bags





# Recycling in Akureyri

There is a problem where people try to recycle plastic that is not packaging – this reduces the proportion of packaging in each batch leading to Terra having to charge the municipalities extra for this.

*Manager at Terra, Akureyri*

## Plastumbúðir

Plastic

Opakowania plastikowe



- Plastpokar • Plastbrúsar s.s hreinsiefni • Plastdósir s.s. skyr, ís, smurostur • Plastfilma glær og lituð
- Plastumbúðir s.s. utan af kexi og sælgæti • Plastbakkar • Plastflöskur s.s. sjampó og sósur
- Frauðplastumbúðir • Pokar utan af snakki
- Plastic bags • Detergent plastic emballage • Plastic cups e.g. yogurt cups, icecream containers, spreadable cheese boxes • Plastic wrappings, clear and coloured • Plastic wrappings e.g. wrappings from candies and crackers • Plastic trays • Plastic containers e.g. bottles for shampoo and sauce
- Styrofoam containers • Snack bags
- Torby foliowe • Butelki plastikowe tj. po chemi gospodarczej • Plastikowe opakowania po jogurtach
- Lodach i serkach • Folia przezroczysta i kolorowa • Opakowania po herbatnikach i stodyczach
- Tacki plastikowe • Opakowania po szamponach i sosach • Opakowania styropianowe
- Opakowania po chipsach





# Plastic Packaging Recycling

- Survey with 15 images of waste:-
- 'Pure' plastic packaging
- Mixed media packaging – plastic and other material(s)
- Non-packaging plastic waste
- General waste
  
- 38 respondents to our preliminary survey (of which 35 were from the Akureyri area)





# 'Pure' Plastics

- Most recycled 'pure' plastic packaging correctly



97%



95%



97%



# Mixed Media Recycling (with Plastics)

- Fewer mixed media plastic packaging were recycled correctly



51% recycled correctly



9% recycled correctly

*“Difficult to disassemble. Cardboard, Metal and plastic. Better don´t buy Such stuff!”*



# Waste Plastics (Non-recyclable, non-packaging)

- A significant number would recycle non-recyclable plastics incorrectly



Non-recyclable (not packaging) but 51% would put the old toothbrush in recycling bin, 11% would put old sponge in recycling, and 14% would recycle the Covid test (biohazard).  
30% would put tablet blister packs in plastic recycling bins.

## Summary of Results

- Most of those surveyed would correctly recycle 'pure' plastic waste.
- The recycling of mixed media waste is still rather unclear, with less recycling this category correctly
- There is evidence of wishcycling with non-packaging and contaminated waste materials being stated as recyclable
- Some questioned their answers, and it was clear that they were not sure of the correct answer

## Conclusion & Further Work

- Education is key to the public understanding what is recyclable, especially with the new legislation of mandatory sorting by individuals
- Tourists and foreign visitors would benefit from information regarding the plastic recycling procedures in Iceland
- Simple, single material, packaging must be considered by manufacturers, in order to bring about more effective recycling
- Further Study will include survey of public across Iceland, clearer images, and review of guidance issued to the public





## Contact details:

Audrey Louise Matthews  
Assistant Professor  
(PhD, SFHEA)

Email: [audrey@unak.is](mailto:audrey@unak.is)

