

Eco-Tip for 11/5/17

Leave it Loose: Keep the Cap on Your Bottle

By David Goldstein, Ventura County PWA, IWMD

A recent recurring advertisement in the Ventura County Star leads with the header “Keep it Clean.” These ads, funded by Harrison Industries, explain “recent changes in overseas recycling markets” which “make it more important than ever to keep your recyclables free from contamination.”

Recyclers eager to keep export options open for recyclables may wonder what that means for their plastic bottles. Should consumers remove labels from bottles before placing bottles in their curbside carts? Should consumers leave lids off of their empty bottles?

The answer to both of these questions is “no.” Several years ago, the advice was “pop the top,” but now sorting equipment has changed, and the advice is “leave it loose,” meaning leave the lid loosely attached to the bottle.

Processors turning recovered bottles into new plastic flakes or pellets for manufacturing use sophisticated equipment to separate and capture as much as possible. For example, they use sink/float separators, which sort plastics based on each plastic type’s specific gravity, and they use air classifiers, which blow lighter types of plastic away from falling streams of lighter types.

Although the labels are typically made from low density polyethylene (labeled with a #4), lids from polypropylene (#5) and the bottles themselves are usually made from either polyethylene terephthalate (#1) or high density polyethylene (#2), each material is now separated and directed to a different manufacturer who will use them in place of natural resources.

Another factor to consider is local sorting centers. Both of the sorting centers in Ventura County have disk screens as their first step. If you put unscrewed bottle tops in your curbside cart, they will fall through the screen, rather than following the bottles. This could result in bottle caps ending up as contamination in bales of paper or in bins of broken glass.

You can recycle as much as possible and help keep recyclables clean by re-screwing lids loosely back on empty bottles, and there is no need to remove labels.

If you have questions about how to prepare your recyclables for curbside recycling, contact your city recycling coordinator or your refuse and recycling hauler. Phone numbers for these contacts likely appears on your refuse bill.