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Plastic Recycling Confusion

By David Leonhardt

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CONSUMER ALERT: do not mix your food container lids. A yogurt container lid is NOT the same as a margarine container lid, even if they look the same. How do I know this? Well, here is my story.

We live in a very hoity-toity county. Sure, it might look like just farm country. A lot of the houses might seem a little worse for wear. But we are very picky about what plastic we recycle. We recycle only those numbered 1 and 2.

In case you did not know, your plastics are numbered. On the bottom of most containers, there is a number, usually from 1 to 5. I suppose 1 is the best, since anything with a number of 3 or more just is not high-class enough for us to recycle.

Sooner or later, it was bound to happen. My overactive curiosity got the better of me and I emptied the fridge to try to figure out this plastic numbering thing. What else does one do in the middle of the night when his newborn doesn't want to sleep?

My wife came down to the kitchen. "What on earth are you doing?"

"Just snacking," I replied.

She scanned the table, covered with yogurt, hand cream, cream cheese, plum sauce, juice, shampoo, and an empty ice cream bucket. "OK, I'm not actually eating any of these," I admitted. "I'm looking for numbers on the bottom to see which of these containers is high-class enough for us to recycle."

"You are NOT recycling our brand new tub of margarine," my wife declared. "And that juice jug is supposed to last us a few more years."

"Of course," I said in my most believable comforting tone. "It's just a curiosity thing".

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"Oh, one of those," my wife sighed.

"You see, both the yogurt and margarine containers are made of PP."

"PP?" my wife asked.

"Yes, PP. Plastic number 5, also called Polypropylene."

"Oh. That's a relief."

"But the lids are not the same. The yogurt top is a number 4, whereas the margarine top is a number 2."

"You mean the lids are not made of the same plastic as the containers?" my wife exclaimed.

"Exactly," I replied. "And not the same as each other. There must be a reason they use for the yogurt top a plastic of such poor upbringing that our recycling program rejects it. It might be dangerous to mix them up."

"That's silly."

"Then why else would they need three different plastics for two simple containers that are used for essentially the same purpose under the same conditions?"

My wife turned around to leave. "Wait," I cried. "There's more."

"I was afraid of that."

"The parfait container has no number. Does that mean it's undercover? The lid is a 4, which means we can switch it with the yogurt lid, but not with the margarine lid."

"The parfait container is clear. You can see through it. Maybe they can't recycle see-through plastics."

"Exactly what I thought," I exclaimed. "But look at your shampoo. It's in a clear bottle, a number 1. But the matching conditioner, which is not clear, is in a number 2."

"That makes sense," my wife assured me. "Maybe."

"Not really. Number 2 is used in the margarine lid, the big ice cream bucket and the vitamin jar. Besides, here is another margarine container made of clear plastic, and it is also a 5 with a 4 lid."

"This is way too confusing," my wife said. "We have a baby to attend to. She just can't seem to sleep."

"With all our containers mixed up like this, who knows what the world is coming to," I cried. "No wonder she can't sleep."

The author is David Leonhardt, The Happy Guy. To receive his satire column weekly in your inbox, sign up at

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The Truth About Free Inkjet Cartridge Recycling

By Niall Roche

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In a recent stand-up routine, comedian George Carlin suggests that maybe man's reason for existence is because the Earth wants plastic.

The comedy team, Penn & Teller, assert in their cable show "Bulls**t" (bullpucky?) that recycling isn't really all that useful and maybe not necessary.

Whether the Earth wants plastic or not, recycling of inkjet cartridges is useful in many different ways. However, before you choose where to recycle your inkjet cartridge, do a little research to make your recycling efforts effective. Recycling won't work if we don't close the loop. Many charitable institutions around the world have initiated ink cartridge recycling programs, which fund hospitals, school activities and other social concerns. This type of funding cuts costs in many ways from tax breaks for charitable donations to lowering the price that we have to pay for the services the funded organizations provide. In addition, remanufactured compatible inkjet cartridges are usually a fraction of the cost of brand name inkjet refills.

Several inkjet printer manufacturers also maintain recycling programs. However, your recycled ink cartridge doesn't always make it around the loop.

Epson, in cooperation with Funding Factory, recently launched a free recycling program for its customers. Schools and businesses can get points for collecting and remitting empty cartridges to Epson. However, the cartridges are not remanufactured or refilled. They are incinerated. To be fair, mention must be made that the incineration is at an environmentally friendly waste-to-energy plant; however, it's easy to see that Epson is the big winner in this recycling effort. Their recycling plan takes cartridges out of the hands of remanufacturing plants that can offer less expensive remanufactured compatible cartridges to the consumer.

Hewlett Packard also has a free recycling program and they proudly announce that more than 1.8 million HP inkjet cartridges were recycled in 2003. Unfortunately, for the consumer, plastics and metal from the HP cartridges are also disassembled and made into new products. Other components are

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"used to generate energy or are disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner."

Canon offers its customers several options for recycling toner cartridges, including a single return option, an up-to-eight multiple return option, and a bulk return option. Whichever you choose, a shipping label can be downloaded directly from their website. Return shipping via UPS is pre-paid by the company. It appears from many recycling and other eco-friendly programs displayed on their website, that Canon is a leader in environmental stewardship, however to date they have no recycling program in place for inkjet cartridges.

Lexmark's recycling program is 100% free, as are the other printer manufacturer recycling programs.

Customers request a kit using an online order form. Lexmark pays the postage both ways. However, there is one major difference between Lexmark's program and the programs of the other print giants. Lexmark works with Planet Ark and Close the Loop in Australia to ensure every collected cartridge is remanufactured or recycled. In addition, they have similar recycling programs in Latin American and South Africa. In Europe, every purchase of a Lexmark high-volume cartridge comes with a postage-paid recycling bag included. Now that's closing the circle!

provides tons of useful information for any inkjet or printer owner. Everything from tips

and advice to reviews of individual suppliers Inkjet Printables has it all.(c) Niall Roche – All Rights Reserved<http://www.inkjet-printables.com>

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