

Black Plastics Should be Removed From the Recycling Bin

Black plastics are bad news. They're toxic, and they're not recyclable. So why are we still using them for single-use packaging?

The Alliance for Mission-Based Recycling (AMBR) advocates for the **elimination of black plastic in packaging and containers.**

Black Plastic, Often Sourced from Electronic Waste, is Toxic

Scientists and environmental health experts have been concerned about black plastic for decades due to toxicity. There are two sources of potential risk in black plastic:

Carbon black, the dye used to turn the plastic black, is potentially carcinogenic to humans. The use of the dye creates labor hazards during production, and potential risks during use. Additionally, often sourced from electronic waste, black plastics have been found to contain flame retardants and heavy metals.

Scientists don't fully know how these hazardous compounds leach into food or beverages during typical use. However, heat and UV are known to increase the movement of otherwise inert chemicals.

Black Plastic Is Extremely Challenging to Recycle

End markets for recycled black plastics are extremely limited for several reasons. Because the coloring in plastic cannot be removed, all colored plastics—including black—have a much lower value than clear or natural plastics. While some reclaimers accept black plastic #2 HDPE or #5 PP, not all have the technology to properly sort it or the demand for a darker material. Recycling facilities cannot rely on just one reclaimer to purchase their sorted materials. Until sorting technology and market demand become widespread, many recycling operators are unable to sell black plastic.

Another major challenge is sorting. Optical sorters, which recycling facilities use to separate plastics by resin type, do not work with black plastic because the dark dye prevents the infrared light from detecting the resin. Some facilities resort to hand-sorting, which increases costs. However, because all black plastics look alike, workers struggle to distinguish between resin types. Proper sorting is essential since different resins melt at different temperatures, and contamination can cause issues during reprocessing. The likelihood that recycled black plastic contains a mix of resins makes reclaimers hesitant to purchase it.



Black Plastic Should No Longer Be Used in Packaging or Containers

AMBR envisions a world where we collectively work toward the elimination of waste, toxics, and pollution, and where all products are reused, refilled, recycled, or composted.

From this viewpoint, AMBR advocates for the elimination of black plastic in packaging or containers due to its toxicity and its lack of a circular end-of-life solution.

Black plastic is so problematic that even the U.S. Plastics Pact, a group of manufacturers, businesses, government groups, and nonprofits working to address plastic pollution, includes, “pigments that cannot be detected by optical sorters, such as carbon black” on their list of plastics that should be eliminated.

You Can Take Action to Support A Solution

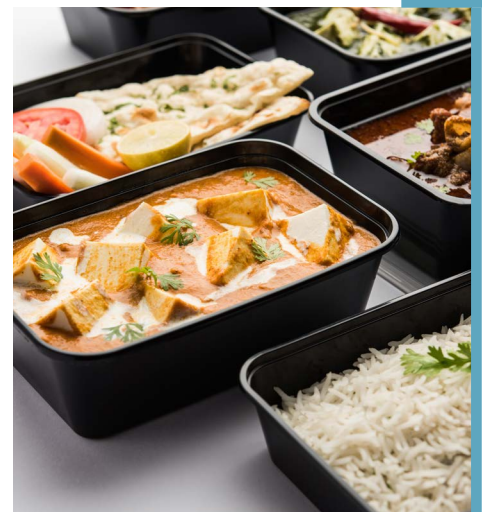
Avoid buying or using black plastic packaging and products. Know that if you do buy it, it will most likely not be recycled. We discourage reuse of black plastic containers due to their toxicity.

If you are a **business owner** serving food in black plastic containers, swap out black plastic for a less toxic, more sustainable alternative. A reusable container is the very best for people and the planet. If you must use single-use, choose a recyclable material like aluminum or recyclable plastics (check your local guidelines). If you have widely available compost in your area with compost manufacturers who accept compostables, BPI-certified compostable packaging is another option.

If you are a **recycling facility operator** that supports mission-based recycling, specify “black plastics” as a “no” on your recycling guidelines.

If you are a **recycling educator**, teach your community to avoid using and purchasing black plastic.

If you are an **elected official**, support local, state, federal, and global policies that keep black plastic out of single-use packaging. These policies include bans on black plastic food serviceware containers, extended producer responsibility for packaging and paper that does not include black plastic on the recyclability list, and post-consumer recycled content mandates.



Black plastics containers harmful chemicals like flame retardants, creating unnecessary health risks when alternatives exist.

Get In Touch with AMBR:

✉ contact@ambr-recyclers.org | 🌐 ambr-recyclers.org

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