



Facts Friday: Where does my recycling go?

For this Plastic Free July feature, we wanted to talk about what happens to recycling when it leaves your blue bin. But here's the thing: **plastic recycling is a little convoluted and very tailored to your specific location.** Our biggest recommendation is to look on the website of your local government for specifics. However, we thought we'd share some things we've learned.

There are two types of recycling: Full Circle Recycling and Downcycling. Full circle is when a recycled material is returned to its original form (e.g. an aluminum can recycled into another aluminum can), while downcycling uses recycled materials to make lower grade products (e.g. a plastic bottle used to create carpet material). **Downcycled materials nearly always end as waste** eventually, and are rarely recyclable themselves. Unfortunately, **all plastic is downcycled** during recycling, because it not only yields a lesser grade stock, but it's simply cheaper to make products from new plastic than to use recycled material.

Municipalities generally either use single-stream or dual-stream (pre-sorted) recycling systems. Single-stream recycling (when everything goes into the same bin) is brought to a **Materials Recovery Facility (MRF)**, where mechanical and hand sorting divides the waste by type of material (aluminum, glass, PET, HDPE, etc.). Sorted materials are baled and shipped off to the actual recycling facilities, which typically accept only one type of material, and reduce it to its basic parts. Finally, this feedstock is shipped **AGAIN** to a facility that will use it for a new purpose. If pre-sorted, recyclables go to a processing center, where they are baled and shipped to a recycler, following a similar route from there.

While recycling can be a better option than the landfill, we hope to promote a new school of thought. When it comes to plastics, get rid of the old "Reduce Reuse Recycle" mantra, and instead try to **"ReFUSE ReDUCE ReUSE", leaving "ReCYCLE" out of the equation altogether.**

If you have any questions about Recycling on Cape Cod, feel free to reach out to Kari Parcell, the Barnstable County Municipal Assistance Coordinator at (508) 375-6974 or (774) 994-7515 or at kari.parcell@barnstablecounty.org