

California Vaunted Plastics Recycling Program Is a Pile of Hot Garbage

By Bob Hoge |

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California has long touted itself as the paragon of environmental virtue, and it's [banned all plastic bags](#) at grocery stores, restricted [the use of plastic straws](#) so customers can watch their paper ones melt into an unappetizing mess, and for years virtue-signaled about requiring residents to put all recyclable materials into blue bins (instead of the black ones for regular garbage).

Notably, their plastic bag bans to date have led to unintended consequences and [more plastic waste](#) instead of less.

Some might consider their efforts to be noble, but at least in the area of plastics recycling, it sure isn't very effective, according to a report by the state's waste agency. Turns out, there isn't [all that much recycling actually happening](#):

Polypropylene, labeled as #5 on packaging, is used for yogurt containers, margarine tubs and microwavable trays. Only 2% of it is getting recycled. Colored shampoo and detergent bottles, made from polyethylene, or #1 plastic, are getting recycled at a rate of just 5%.

Other plastics, including ones promoted as highly recyclable, such as clear polyethylene bottles, which hold some medications, or hard water bottles, are being recycled at just 16%.

No plastic in the report exceeds a recycling rate of 23%, with the majority reported in just the single digits.

For all the money, effort, resources, and moral posturing, these numbers seem pretty lousy, don't they?

New Report from the California State Waste Agency shows items being put in the blue recycling bins by residents aren't actually being recycled

Only 1% of milk jugs are recycled, only 2% of certain plastic material is recycled

California instead brings it to dumps. (What a scam)... pic.twitter.com/vJIKt5MxvW

— Wall Street Apes (@WallStreetApes) [January 16, 2026](#)

I'm not an "anti-environmentalist," and I want to see the planet continue to thrive as much as anyone else. That being said, week after week, year after year, as I dutifully separate the recyclables into the blue and the trash into the black, I've always wondered, "Are they *really* recycling this stuff? I ain't buying it." Turns out I have reason to be skeptical.

Reports on abysmally [low rates of recycling](#) for [milk cartons](#) and [polystyrene](#) have been widely shared and known. But the newest numbers were still a grim confirmation that there are few options for dealing with these materials.

According to [one state analysis](#), 2.9 million tons of single-use plastic and 171.4 billion single-use plastic components were sold, offered for sale, or distributed in California in 2023.

Plastic recycling is a total scam. It does absolutely nothing positive. pic.twitter.com/I2Q6AGZ5NZ

— I Love America News (@ILA_NewsX) [January 16, 2026](#)

Plastics are a tricky problem because they do in fact end up contaminating the waterways and negatively affecting wildlife, and they are hard to get rid of. I have an idea, though: how about we dig a

big hole in the ground and put waste there? That would keep it out of the waterways, at least. We could call it a “landfill.”

Although many claim that our landfills are close to capacity, the truth is that there is plenty left for the time being. Trash continues to be a problem, and we should keep looking for solutions, but as Waste 360 wrote, “Regional Landfill Capacity Problems Do Not Equate to a National Shortage.”

Perhaps that would work better than constantly issuing punitive laws aimed at residents and businesses — laws that don’t seem to be effective at solving anything.