

# KCB MONTHLY

JUNE 2023



## Letter from the KCB Board

A new documentary film called Plastic Earth explains how plastic is harming our environment. This documentary is the brainchild of native Georgian, real estate agent Janice Overbeck, who is a mom to four girls. As the narrator mentions in the introduction, the United Nations describes a triple planetary crisis, and plastics are contributing to all three of these threats:

- Air pollution, which kills 7 million people every year
- Biodiversity loss, with 1 million species facing extinction
- Climate change

The problem is plastics are designed to last forever, and all this plastic material is continuing to build up. Only 9% of plastics have ever been collected to be recycled.

Another problem with plastic is what it is doing to our bodies. We know we are ingesting microplastics in our food and water. During testing, 93% of bottled waters were found to contain microplastics. But the microparticles are too large to penetrate our cells. It's the chemical additives in plastics that can enter our cells. Phthalates, which are found in plastics, are now classified as endocrine disrupters. One such phthalate – BPA – has been banned only in baby bottles, but there are many other products made with BPA. Phthalates disrupt sexual development in infants and impair fertility in adults. They suppress the activity of male hormones during the development of the fetus. Researchers have linked exposure to BPA to diabetes, breast cancer, obesity, and neurological disorders.

The documentary details many possible biotech solutions that companies are working on – such as bioplastics, biodegradable plastics, compostable and molded fiber alternatives. Conventional plastics are made from fossil fuels – coal (PE), natural gas (PP), or petroleum oil (PET) – and can take hundreds of years to break down, if they ever do. Bio-based plastics are made from plant products – such as corn, hemp, olive oil, and sugar cane. These do not add so much to the carbon footprint as petroleum plastics because plants take carbon out of the air. These plastics are known as PLA, PHA, and PBS.

The documentary also discusses cleanup efforts by companies such as The Ocean Cleanup. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch – a huge pile of plastic floating in the middle of the ocean – 50% of it is plastic fishing

nets. 640,000 tons of fishing gear are lost every year. 640,000 tons of fishing gear are lost every year. Other than from fishing, how else does plastic enter our oceans? Through rivers. Satellite imaging studies have revealed that 1,000 rivers are responsible for 80% of the world's plastic pollution, the worst culprit being the Yangtze River. Much of this garbage in the rivers is the result of a lack of waste collection in developing countries. An astounding statistic is that 1 in 3 people in the world don't have proper waste management.

Part of the solution – which we can all do – is to reduce our consumption of single-use plastics. Half of all plastic is designed to be used only once. What if we all became more mindful in our choices? We can switch to glass containers and buy foods in bulk. We can bring our own re-usable grocery bags when we go shopping. We can choose glass soap dispensers and buy soap refills that come in aluminum bottles. (Aluminum is almost infinitely recyclable, as it doesn't degrade when recycled like plastic does.) We can purchase powdered laundry detergent in cardboard boxes rather than liquid detergent that comes in plastic bottles. And here's a tip for my fellow Starbucks lovers – bring your own refillable cup, and you will earn 25 stars in their app, which is worth almost \$1 in rewards.

Lisa Johnson  
Board Member  
Keep Cherokee Beautiful

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## Why The Recycling Symbol Could End Up In The Trash Bin

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is teaming up with environmental groups to ditch the circular arrow symbol so consumers are more aware of which plastics can truly be recycled.



For decades, three arrows pointing in a triangular loop have been the iconic symbol for recycling, but that could change. The EPA is urging the Federal Trade Commission to drop the symbol from plastics that aren't actually recyclable.

Combining the recycling symbol with the resin identification code does not accurately represent recyclability as many plastics (especially 3-7) do not have end markets and are not financially viable to recycle, the EPA said to the FTC in its comment. The EPA stated that the pairing is “confusing” for consumers.

Unfortunately, many of the plastics displaying the recycling symbol are not in fact recyclable.

Just because there's a recycling symbol on the packaging doesn't mean it should be placed in the recycling bin. Most single-use plastic isn't recyclable at all. Even No. 1 and 2 plastics can only be recycled

once before they ultimately end up in a landfill or incinerator.

Recycling categories 3 to 7 undermine the efficiency of the recycling process. When placed in a bin, recycling categories 3 through 7 will not be recycled resulting in these items being sorted and removed from the recycling stream which is costly and time-consuming.

So far, the FTC has received more than 7,000 comments suggesting updates to its Green Guides — including those from the EPA — since the review was announced in December of 2022. It remains unclear if a change will happen anytime soon.

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## Event Recap

### Atlanta Gas Light Cleanup Event

We want to thank the Atlanta Gas Light staff members for their participation in the cleanup of Wilbanks Road on June 2. There were a total of five volunteers working for one hour collecting five bags of trash from the roadway.



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## Who Does It Better

The best state for recycling is Maine, where 74 percent of the state's waste is recycled. Maine also recycles the most per resident with an average of 285 pounds of waste recycled per capita, and it's one of just 10 states that has a deposit return system (DPS) in place. All but two of the top 10 states were found to have a DPS in place.

Maine was found to have the highest rate of recycling cardboard and boxboard, as well as rigid plastics, recycling plastic bottles, and recycling both types of bottles and jars. Pennsylvania was found to have the highest rate of steel recycling and tied Maine for the highest cardboard recycling rate. Michigan has the country's highest rate of aluminum can recycling.

### The 10 Best States at Recycling

1. Maine
2. Vermont
3. Connecticut
4. Oregon
5. California
6. Massachusetts
7. Iowa
8. Delaware
9. New Jersey

## Which U.S. State Is the Worst at Recycling?

The worst state at recycling is Alaska, with the country's lowest recycling rate of just 16 percent of the state's waste being recycled. Alaska also recycles the least per resident, an average of just 53 pounds of waste recycled per capita. Alaska only recycles 1 percent of its rigid plastics and PET bottles and just 3 percent of aluminum cans. The state's government hasn't passed legislation that supports high common containers and packaging materials recycling or a deposit return system. Why is Alaska bad at recycling? Alaska's low rates can be attributed to the fact that most Alaskans don't have access to curbside recycling. As for the contiguous states, Mississippi was found to have the lowest recycling rate, with only 17 percent of all waste in the state being recycled. Mississippi also has the least amount of material recycled per resident, at just 63 pounds per capita.

## The 10 Worst States at Recycling

1. Alaska
2. Mississippi
3. Tennessee
4. Alabama
5. Ohio
6. Kentucky
7. Louisiana
8. New Mexico
9. Arkansas
10. Oklahoma

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## From the Recycling Center

### What Gets Recycled?

Single Stream Recycling accepts plastics 1, 2, paper, cardboard, aluminum and steel cans.

If you are putting anything else in the container you are "WishCycling," hoping something will be recycled. It won't. Not only will it not be recycled but now you have made the recycling process more difficult because those unrecyclable items need to be sorted out of the recycling stream.

The exception to this is if hard to recycle items are placed in an orange bag such as the Hefty Renew bag. These bags are separated and sent to a different facility for processing.

**WHEN IN DOUBT THROW IT OUT!**

Non-recyclable items:

- Garbage

- Food waste
- Food-tainted items (such as: used paper plates or boxes, paper towels, or paper napkins)
- Ceramics and kitchenware
- Windows and mirrors
- Plastic wrap
- Packing peanuts and bubble wrap
- Wax boxes
- Photographs
- Medical waste
- Polystyrene or styrofoam
- Hazardous chemicals and chemical containers
- Plastic toys or sporting goods equipment
- Foam egg cartons
- Wood
- Light bulbs
- Yard waste or garden tools

Troy Brazie  
Manager  
Cherokee County Recycling Center

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