

Mr. Fred N. Matthews  
4805 SE 28<sup>TH</sup> Avenue  
Portland, OR 97202

Dear Mr. Matthews:

Thank you for your e-mail of April 16, 2000, that was forwarded to us on May 22, 2000, by Senator Ron Wyden. In your correspondence, you expressed interest in the "recycling logo and number representing the type of plastic being used," and whether any federal program required the use of these symbols.

I believe the recycling symbols you mention are a reference to those placed on the bottom of plastic containers beginning in 1988, due to a voluntary effort by the Society of the Plastics Industry (SPI). Commonly referred to as SPI codes, the numbers within the recycling "chasing arrows" symbol refer to different plastic resin types: **1** Poly-Ethylene Terephthalate (PET); **2** High Density Polyethylene (HDPE); **3** Vinyl/Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC); **4** Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE); **5** Polypropylene (PP); **6** Polystyrene (PS); and, **7** Other. This system was introduced to make separation of the many similar-appearing plastic resin types easier for recycling centers across the country. There was no federal legislation or program to mandate these symbols, though many states have now adopted legislation that mandate its use.

On the federal level, there is currently no legislative authority to mandate specific labeling systems to facilitate increased recycling. In general, plastics are one of the most difficult to recycle of the various recyclable commodity types. In the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) most recent characterization study of Municipal Solid Waste (waste generation and recovery in 1998), we found that plastics are recycled at a rate of 5.4 percent, well below the 28.2 percent national average for all commodity types. States have attempted to improve the plastics recycling rate by using their legislative authority in a variety of ways. In addition to bottle bills, certain states such as your own home state of Oregon have passed packaging recycling laws which require all packaging to be recycled at a certain minimum percentage.

Although there is no federal authority for recycling labels, we will continue to

encourage the plastics industry to continue their voluntary efforts to increase the recycling rates of plastics.

If you have additional questions about the SPI codes or about the industry's efforts to increase recycling, we encourage you to call the American Plastics Council at 1-800-243-5490.

Thank you for your interest in this important issue and for your concern about recycling.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Cotsworth, Director  
Office of Solid Waste

cc: Senator Ron Wyden

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