

# The Importance of Clarity

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*Food Waste Composting:  
Challenges, Lessons & Successes*  
*National Zero Waste Business Conference*  
*June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016*



GreenBlue is a non-profit dedicated to researching and promoting the principles of Sustainable Materials Management





# GreenBlue's Sustainable Packaging Coalition

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- Membership group that brings together hundreds of companies & stakeholders
- Working *together* to broaden the understanding of packaging sustainability, develop meaningful improvements

Reports



Packaging  
design tools



Educational  
courses



Conferences



Consulting



# GreenBlue Compost Collaborative

Collaboration of Key Action  
Stakeholders



**KEEP AMERICA  
BEAUTIFUL**



**US** Composting  
Council

# **Value of Compostable Packaging “Foodservice-Ware”**

**It facilitates the diversion of waste  
associated with food scraps, but...**

**Contamination from non-compostables,  
and lack of clarity on what is certified  
compostable, remains a major issue**

# Main Issues with Compostable Packaging

1. Lack of understanding of the composting process and end product
2. Contamination from look-alikes
3. Absent or unclear marking and labeling
4. Overall messaging conflating compost collection with recycling
5. Inconsistency in messaging
6. Processing in various composting technologies
7. Organic certification



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# Lack of Understanding

- Lack of consumer understanding of composting (and recycling!) generally generates incorrect sorting
- General “eco-friendly” language confuses consumers
- Even composters incorrectly use the term “biodegradable” or “decomposable” – it’s not the same!



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# Lookalike Products



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# Lack of Marking is Also Problematic

Vermont sued Penley (2011) and Fabri-Kal (2012) for not properly disclosing limited availability of composting options – now no label causes contamination of recycling



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# USCC Guides

“Graphic elements are encouraged to increase legibility of the word “compostable” and overall product distinction that may include text boxes, stripes, bands, or a green or brown tint of the product.”



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## Labeling Guidelines for Compostable Plastics Associated with Food Scraps or Yard Trimmings

The goal of these guidelines is to identify compostable plastics associated with food scraps or yard trimmings (e.g., bags, plates, cups, cutlery, trays, and take out or food packaging) which are certified as compostable in commercial or industrial composting facilities. These guidelines should allow the public and retail consumers, material haulers, and processors to distinguish compostable from non-compostable products for proper handling of items after use. The guidelines for labeling compostable plastic products are as follows:

1. Products intended to be composted in a commercial composting facility shall meet ASTM D6400 "Standard Specification for Labeling of Plastics Designed to be Aerobically Composted in Municipal or Industrial Facilities" or ASTM D6868 "Standard Specification for Labeling of End Items that Incorporate Plastics and Polymers as Coatings or Additives with Paper and Other Substrates Designed to be Aerobically Composted in Municipal or Industrial Facilities."
2. Labeling of products, packaging and sales materials or websites for products sold in the U.S. shall comply with pertinent US regulations and guidelines, including the Federal Trade Commission's "Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims" (Part 260) that clearly qualifies the products as suitable for composting only in a commercial composting facility.
3. Each product should be labeled with the word "compostable" along with the qualifying language listed below that is as readily visible and readable by the average person as technically possible and not cost prohibitive. Each product should display the labeling language via printing, embossing, or compostable adhesive stickers and using, when possible, the color green or brown that contrasts with background product color for easy identification. Graphic elements are encouraged

to increase legibility of the word "compostable" and overall product distinction that may include text boxes, stripes, bands, or a green or brown tint of the product. The product shall be labeled with one of the following statements in order of descending preference as technically and economically possible:

- I. "Compostable where accepted in a commercial facility, check in your area," with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification logo for meeting ASTM D6400 or 6868;
  - II. "Compostable where accepted in a commercial facility" with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification logo for meeting ASTM D6400 or 6868;
  - III. "Commercially Compostable where accepted" with 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification logo for meeting ASTM D6400 or 6868 ("compostable" and logo highest priority for cutlery); or
  - IV. Cutlery or very small products should be labeled at a minimum with: "Compostable" along with 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification logo (embossing or cutout enhances visibility).
4. A package containing a compostable plastic product should be labeled as follows (as applicable):  
"This product is certified by [insert 3<sup>rd</sup> party name and logo] to meet ASTM D6400 or ASTM D6868 for being compostable in a commercial compost facility. Commercial compost facilities and/or composting programs may not exist in your area. Check with your local municipality to determine if this product is accepted for composting or recycling. This product has not been certified for home composting."

Plastic bags labeled as "compostable" should not have chasing arrows symbols (including the symbol used for the resin identification code), as removing chasing arrows on bags will not conflict with state laws and reduces confusion.

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About the USCC: The United States Composting Council (USCC) is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to the development, expansion and promotion of the composting industry. For more information visit [www.compostingcouncil.org](http://www.compostingcouncil.org)

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# Marking and Labeling: Compost Label Landscape

## *Current BPI Label*



## *Other Labels Being Used in the US and Abroad*



# Resin Identification Code Confusion



- RICs used incorrectly as recycling indicators
- #7 is “Other” and compostables fall under this category, with other non-compostables



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# Inconsistency of Public Communication



Including “all paper” introduces micro-plastics into the system and reinforces misconception that cartons and some foodservice items are “wax-lined”



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# Solutions

- Educate the public, distributors, municipalities, brands
- Designers work with composters
- Work ongoing within and beyond the Composting Collaborative
- Update USCC toolkits and promote their use
- Expand use of BPI logo through the new How2Compost Label Program



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# The How2Compost Label



**\*Not in backyard;  
Composting  
programs for this  
cup may not  
exist in your area.**

**CONSUMER TESTING  
Round 2 Recently  
Completed**

**LABEL LAUNCH:  
Summer 2016**



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# On-package Labeling: The SPC's How2Recycle Label Program



## Widely Recycled

At least 60% of Americans can recycle this package at curbside recycling or drop-off recycling.



## \*Not recycled in all communities

## Sometimes Recycled

Between 60% and 20% of Americans can recycle this package at curbside recycling or drop-off recycling. Check your local program.



## Not Yet Recycled

Either less than 20% of Americans can recycle this package, or, it could cause a problem in a recycling facility.



## Store Drop-off

Anyone who lives near a store that accepts plastic bags and wraps for recycling can take this packaging to that store and recycle it there.

# Adding Compostability to H2R: Why?

***Advance better labeling to help both consumers & generators provide clean food scrap streams to composters***

- Elevate the use of the BPI logo
- Some packages are recyclable and compostable
- Some packages have recyclable and compostable components
- Help address look-alikes and unlabeled compostables
- Aims to get ahead of local labeling legislation by creating industry-consistent label



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# Example Uses



# Example: a Bag of Compostable Cups



[how2recycle.info](http://how2recycle.info)



[how2compost.info](http://how2compost.info)

\*Not in backyard; Composting programs for this cup may not exist in your area.



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# Example for Dual Stream



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# Thank you!

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