

## Recycling

By: Ethan Ritenour, Sound to Sea Instructor

I had a dilemma. I was carrying my plastic water bottle over to the recycling bin when a question entered my brain that I had wondered many times before. Do I leave the cap on or take it off? I stood there for a few seconds mulling over it in my head before I resolved to finally figure it out.

I went back to my computer to do some sleuthing. After searching for a bit, I found [recyclemorenc.org](http://recyclemorenc.org), a website dedicated to providing information about what can and can't be recycled. On the home page, there was some information and two big icons labeled "What Can I Recycle?" and "What Can't I Recycle?" I decided to start by looking at what I can recycle and clicked the link. It took me to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's website, where there was a handy map of every county in North Carolina and their material recovery facilities. Pine Knoll Shores, for instance, recycles to the Sonoco recycling facility in Onslow County.

It also has a handy poster with information about what can be recycled there. For instance, all plastic bottles, tubs, jugs, and jars are recyclable, regardless of the number listed on the recycling symbol on the item. All metal cans are recyclable as well, along with glass bottles and jars. Paper is recyclable here, along with cardboard as long as it is flattened. That includes things like cardboard tubes, cereal boxes, and other cardboard boxes. All bottles and cans should be rinsed out before they are recycled as well, because they will be thrown out at the facility if they are not cleaned.

Once I had read up on what I could recycle, I decided to check out what I couldn't recycle. After clicking the link from the original site, I found a few more posters with information on things I could not recycle. I learned that bagged recyclables don't recycle, and neither do cords or hoses. Pumps and tubes like toothpaste containers also don't work. Neither do aerosol cans, food waste, paper towels and napkins, clothes, and receipts. Perhaps the biggest section of all, however, was about single use plastics. What surprised me about this was just how many single use plastics there were, things such as grocery bags, food wrappers, plastic forks, knives, and spoons, straws, and other things that are only used once and then tossed in the trash.

Many of these single use plastics can be substituted for more sustainable alternatives. For instance, instead of a plastic grocery bag, use a reusable shopping bag. Instead of plastic water bottles, use reusable water bottles, instead of plasticware and disposable napkins, use silverware and washable cloth napkins. There are all sorts of ways to reduce the amount of waste generated.

Finally, the site also explained ways to recycle things that couldn't be recycled at the facility. For instance, appliances and electronics can often be taken to convenience centers and then they will be broken down into their components. Clothing can usually be taken to thrift shops or other secondhand stores. Lots of food waste and certain napkins can be composted into nutrient-rich fertilizer for gardens and plants.

To answer my original question, water bottles, and really any recyclable plastic container, should have their caps on when they get recycled. My question was answered, and, in the process, I learned so much more about recycling than I had ever learned before. I dropped my water bottle into the recycling bin, cap and all, with a better understanding of a service I used every day but knew almost nothing about until now.

We can all do our part to help beautify and practice sustainable waste management at Trinity Center and beyond by recycling all that we can. The next time you visit Trinity Center take some time to locate the recycling bins. They can usually be found in the conference areas. If in doubt, ask a helpful employee and we will help guide you to the correct bin!