



The ULS Report™

Helping people Use Less Stuff™ by conserving resources and reducing waste.

Turning Old Packages Into New Summer Fun

By Robert Lilienfeld, Editor

Last month, we cited a recent lifecycle study that found what we've suspected for some time: recycling plastic packaging makes strong environmental sense, since the ensuing resins significantly reduce waste versus the production of their virgin counterparts.

Much, if not most, plastic packaging is produced from three resins: low density polyethylene (LDPE) used in bags; high density polyethylene (HDPE) used in bottles,



jars and jugs; and polyethylene terephthalate (PET) used in soda and water bottles. For reference, the "chasing arrow" recycling symbols for these three plastics are #4, #2, and #1, respectively.

As consumers, we typically think about recycling from the standpoint of what we put in our bins. *But the true test of recycling is what manufacturers put in their products.* In fact, recycled materials come in two varieties: post industrial and post consumer. Our interest is in the post consumer recycled materials (also known as PCR), as they are the ones collected from our homes, schools, churches, cars, restaurants, and offices.

Since it's summer, we decided to look for seasonal products made from post consumer recycled plastic packaging. We were particularly interested in products that offer good quality while using significant quantities of recycled materials. Here's what we found...

Hit the Decks (and Fences)

If you're thinking about new decking or fencing, you should consider composite lumber, made by a company called Trex. Each year, they turn *1.5 billion plastic bags* into decking and fencing, which is made from 95%



recycled materials. It doesn't crack, warp or splinter and it's virtually maintenance free, since it doesn't need to be sealed. By using this product to build the average 500 square foot deck, you'll keep about 140,000 recycled plastic bags out of landfills. Learn more at www.trex.com.

Take a Seat

Now that you've got your deck, you need something to sit on. How about some Adirondack chairs or a bench for your garden? They're also made from composite lumber, this time produced from recycled detergent and household cleaning bottles, milk jugs, and juice containers. The chairs and table are called Generation Line. They have a 10 year warranty plus lots of styles and fade resistant colors to choose from. Call your local outdoor furniture store or go to www.generation-line.com.



From Fanta to Fabric

The PET resin used to produce water and soda bottles is a polyester, and like other polyesters can be made into fibers. That's exactly what happens when most PET is recycled. Much of it becomes carpeting, but there are also

lots of summertime uses as well. For example, how do you stay enviro-cool and dry while sitting in your recycled chair on your recycled deck?

- Take out your trusty recycled umbrella. Totes has a number of Eco ‘brellas with fabric made of 100% recycled soda bottles.
- Put on your eco-friendly recycled PET baseball cap. You can get one at www.recycledproducts.com.
- Relax in your recycled PET hammock, also available from www.recycledproducts.com.
- Grab a drink from your recycled PET insulated cooler. There are many on the market to choose from.

Pretty impressive, right? But don’t forget that you have a big role to play in both making these products possible and making the most of valuable resources. If you simply remember the 3 Rs — Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle; and follow them in order, you’ll do great:

First, use as few bags as possible, and purchase liquids in large sizes and concentrated form — you’ll buy more product per unit of package. Second, get as much use out of packaging as you can by reusing bags and bottles. Third, when its useful life is over, make sure packaging is properly recycled. Finally, look for products that are made from post consumer recycled (PCR) materials.

By the way, you can probably put most plastic bottles in your recycling bin. But if you can’t put plastic bags into the bin, many stores accept them. These include Kroger and Walmart. Simply take the bags back when you return your beer and soda bottles. (Why not return the bottles IN the bags?) For more info on recycling locations, go to www.plasticbagrecycling.org. Happy summer! ♻️ ♻️ ♻️

Solar: The Ultimate Renewable Resource?

Since it’s summer and the sun is out, we went looking for solar-powered products that would make July and August a bit more eco-friendly. Besides recharging devices, we found solar-powered lawn mowers, patio lights, ovens, coolers, back packs, and even golf carts! Before purchasing these types of items, we’ve learned from experience to keep the following in mind:

- In general, solar powered products are not truly solar powered. *They are run on batteries that are*

recharged by solar power. You can’t just point the solar panel at the sun and go. Make sure the product is fully charged before using.

- Solar charging can take a long time. (Assume about 3 hours of exposure to direct sunlight for each hour of product usage.) And, when we say direct sunlight, we mean it. Haze, clouds and even clear glass will reduce charging efficiency. A solar powered lawn mower can take up to five days of sunny exposure to completely recharge. Check the manual for operating tips and best results.
- Solar power may not be as effective as other sources. For example, a solar-powered cooler can keep its contents within 30 degrees of the outside temperature. This is probably OK when the outside temperature is in the low 70s. But at 95° outside, it’s 65° inside the cooler, which is not acceptable for storing meats and other perishables.

We did find quite a few solar products that can help reduce energy consumption while increasing summer fun. One of our favorites is this solar powered iPod speaker. It’s water-resistant and rugged, so it’s perfect for outdoor use around the pool or picnic table. Once charged, slip in an iPod, iPhone or mp3 player and chill to your favorite music. The sun will charge the unit’s lithium ion batteries which will recharge the batteries in your player. Available in Hammacher Schlemmer stores or online at www.hammacher.com.



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4853 Goodison Place Drive
Rochester, MI 48306
248-726-9729
www.use-less-stuff.com
info@use-less-stuff.com

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Robert M. Lilienfeld
TECHNICAL ADVISOR EMERITUS: Dr. William Rathje

We welcome your comments and story ideas.
Contact Bob Lilienfeld: bob@use-less-stuff.com.
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