

*Eco-Tip for 2-10-19*

## **No More “Pop the Top;” Now We “Leave on the Lid”**

By David Goldstein, VC PWA, IWMD

Directions for recycling plastic bottles have changed over the years, and now, with contamination restricting export options for recyclables, many people wonder whether they should remove caps from plastic bottles.

The answer is “leave on the lid.” The lid does not contaminate recyclables.

Daniel Marks, owner of Berg Mill Supply Company, which markets much of the recyclable material from Ventura County, explains, “Soda bottle lids are made from a different plastic than soda bottles, but grinding is one of the first steps at the plastic recycling factory. A simple sink/float tank separates the two types of plastic.” The poly propylene from lids floats, and the polyethylene terephthalate from the body of the bottle sinks.

With milk jugs, the lid and the container are the similar types of plastic, so they can be processed together. Other containers may be made from different types of plastics, and in some cases, lids can be hard to separate, but recycling plastics other than bottles labeled #1 or #2 is difficult for many reasons in the current market.

Leaving on the lid also has the advantage of preventing contamination of paper. Bottles should be free of liquid, of course, before being placed in a recycling bin, but in case some drops are still in a bottle, lids keep that liquid away from paper. Separated lids can also become contamination if they get caught between layers of paper. A final advantage of leaving on lids is the prevention of bottles stored outdoors at recycling centers from collecting water

Years ago, some recyclers said, “Pop the top.” They were concerned about what would happen to lids during compaction. But now, the walls of plastic bottles have become so thin that compaction results in bottles splitting down the side, rather than shooting off their lids or resisting compaction.

Rinsing before recycling is not necessary but can be helpful for removing the last bit of a sugary drink, which might otherwise stink or attract insects. Scraping or rinsing is also helpful for removal of contents like peanut butter and mayonnaise. Motor oil and antifreeze must be completely drained. Removing a bottle’s label can also be helpful but is not required.