

Recycling Product Labels

Question:

Wouldn't it be easier if product labels showed with clear graphics what can and can't be recycled? For example, shouldn't packages of pens, toothbrushes, coffee, tea bags, razors and other common products tell us what we can recycle? Can we recycle that nice plastic and paper container that pens come in? Can we recycle the pens? It seems to me we'd have better compliance if consumers had clear information about what to recycle.

— Sue Arnold, Arlington

Answer:

That is a good idea. But Susan Collins of the Container Recycling Institute said there are too many variables to make it workable. Every community, she said, has different markets for its recyclables and thus has different rules for what to do with packaging and products.

Said Susan: "If I'm buying strawberries or blueberries, the maker doesn't know what to put on the container because they could be selling to me — and in my community we're not supposed to put it in the bin — or to a community five miles away that is supposed to put it in their bin."

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