

## Tales from Tim's Recycling Bin – Yes, and...

Not many people know that in college I worked part-time in the promotions department of a local comedy club. I learned many things such as I'm not as funny as I think I am, and that every job including being a comedian takes hard work and practice.

One of the practices that improv comedians use is call "Yes, and..." where an improviser accepts what the previous improviser said and then builds on that line of thinking. Now you're probably wondering why I'm sharing this story. It's because that background helps set up this column.

Last time we talked about the types of plastic to put in your recycling cart – bottles, jugs, cups, and containers. Yes, and...sometimes there is an exception. In this case black plastic. Some common uses of black plastic that we see are to-go food containers and microwave meal trays. Even though they're containers made from types of plastics that manufactures use, they don't want black plastic containers.

Why not? Two reasons. First, sorting facilities use optical sorting machines to separate the different types of plastic. The machines bounce a beam of light off the object and depending on the waves of light that return the machine can tell if the object is made with #1 or #2 plastic. However, with black plastic no light comes back, and the objects don't get sorted. We end up with a pile of mixed plastics that most manufacturers can't use.



The other reason is that black plastic is saturated with dye. A manufacturer can't turn a black to-go container into a clear plastic water bottle.

People much smarter than me are working on technology to solve these issues, but those solutions are years away. In the meantime, don't put black plastic items in your recycling cart my friends.