STORE DROP-OFF
QUICK REFERENCE

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Today, almost no curbside recycling programs accept flexible films because they are difficult to sort at Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs). To help solve this issue, **store drop-off (SDO) recycling** allows consumers to bring specific flexible plastic film packaging to designated collection bins, usually in retail stores. These materials are sent to specialized recycling facilities and processed into new products.

Most drop-off points accept films and flexible packaging made from **polyethylene (PE) labeled as #2 or #4 plastics,** such as bread/produce bags, plastic grocery bags, bubble wrap, etc. These programs do not currently accept food/cling wrap, rigid plastics, prepackaged food bags, compostable plastics, multilayer films like chip bags/wrappers, and plastic film with excessive residue.

Challenges with Store Drop-Off

- Consumers don't know SDO exists or how to find drop-off points.
- SDO materials are mainly "downcycled" into lower-quality products, reducing their future recyclability.
- Contamination from food residue, multilayer or metalized films, adhesives, etc., reduces recycled material quality.
- There is a lack of transparency and reliable data around where materials end up and active drop-off points.

Improving the SDO System

- To move toward a curbside system for SDO materials, we must use the existing framework.
- PCR content from SDO materials should be incorporated into more consumer flexible film products.
- Build trust and transparency by using validated, traceable data for a new SDO directory.
- Build retailer participation with an efficient data collection process that adapts to their internal systems.

The How2Recycle "Store Drop-Off Label" for flexible plastic packaging informs consumers how to properly dispose of their products.

What happens to the recycled films?

The most common end market for SDO material is currently to send it to a company like Trex, which turns the material into **"plastic lumber"** for decking, roofing, etc. Some recycled material is also turned into durable goods (outdoor furniture, trash cans, etc.), trash liner bags, and plastic shipping pallets.

Is SDO a long-term strategy?

Ultimately, the goal is to develop a curbside system for consumers to recycle flexible plastic packaging and films. The hope is with greater consumer education, economic incentives, and a more effective collection process, we can recycle SDO materials into higher quality goods, keeping them in use and out of landfills.

SDO-ELIGIBLE FILMS

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Many brands have made ambitious sustainability commitments, including using more sustainable packaging. To meet their goals, brands tend to consider shifting to recyclable or compostable packaging where possible. This can pose a challenge for brands who rely on flexible plastic films for their packaging, as there is a lack of infrastructure in the U.S. to recycle these films curbside.

If a brand uses a PE flexible plastic film today, they may be able to simply gain the SDO label. However, if they're using something that isn't SDO-eligible, they may wonder whether to switch to a film that would be SDO-eligible, or whether to pursue a different package altogether.

Here are the options brands might consider as they face this challenge:

Curbside-recyclable, fiber-based flexible packaging

- Best for applications with low performance requirements (e.g., few/no barrier properties needed) – great for e-commerce
- Can be made with PCR content

Compostable flexible packaging

- Most appropriate use is in food-related applications
- Promising, but needs much more innovation and development to achieve needed barrier properties
- Tend to be costly

Rigid plastic packaging (Generally accepted for curbside recyclability)

- Higher curbside recyclability compared to plastic films
- But there is increased material usage/weight compared to films
- Likely more expensive than films

Store Drop-Off, monomaterial PE plastic

- May result in higher material usage compared to multi-material film, more product waste, and/or reduced machine compatibility
- Can be made with PCR content
- Makes sense in situations listed below

If a brand must use a plastic film, packaging EPR is part of our rationale for prioritizing the film that results in the lowest material use, even if it's not eligible for SDO.

Switching to SDO-eligible film may be worth considering if:

- The switch is for an application that could not switch to a curbside-recyclable option instead
- The SDO film still meets minimum performance requirements
- The new mono-material PE film requires a similar gauge of film
- The new film runs on existing machinery
- The application is for a product that does not leave oily/greasy/powdery residue