

PLASTIC FANTASTIC

Pre-reading: In pairs/groups, use 3 minutes to make as long a list as possible of plastic items which you use in your everyday life. Compare and see which group has the longest list.



Plastic items

It is all around us in our everyday life and we would find it hard and probably impossible to do without it. We buy water and fizzy drinks in plastic bottles, drink out of plastic cups and meat, fruit, vegetables and many other goods in the supermarket are packed in plastic.

What is Plastic?

Plastic is used in insulation, window frames, etc. in our homes and new cars are full of plastic fittings, plastic electrical parts and plastic cables.

But what is plastic? Well, plastic is the name of some man-made polymers produced by a chemical process. A polymer is formed by joining together many molecules of a substance into a long chain. These polymer chains can consist of many thousands of molecules. You can imagine one looking like a long strand of cooked spaghetti. In a plastic material there will be thousands of these strands. Plastic means flexible and easily moulded, just like a heap of spaghetti where all the strands can slide over and around each other.

Types of Plastic

Plastics are divided into 7 main types and are marked by a symbol with a number inside it. like those below. If you examine a plastic object you should find one of these symbols stamped on it.



plastic symbols

Uses of Plastics

PET water and juice drink bottles, trays for vegetables

PE-HD bottles for washing-up liquids, bottle caps

PVC window frames, pipes, electrical insulation

PE-LD plastic bags, plastic wrap

PP ice cream boxes, flower pots, rope

PS disposable cups, yogurt and sour cream cartons, CD covers

OTHER e.g. melamine, a more rigid plastic, which is often used for plates and cups

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