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Plastic recycling rules changing for JBLM

Marisa Petrich/Northwest Guardian

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If you've ever stared at the bottom of a plastic container and puzzled over what exactly that little number means, wonder no more. Joint Base Lewis-McChord's plastics recycling program is expanding, and the benefits are manifold.

Now plastic items that were previously excluded from the large, gray comingled recycling totes on base, such as tubs (for yogurt or butter), buckets and plant pots can now be included.

"It was so confusing before — (now) so many more plastics can go in there," JBLM Public Works Environmental Division Operations Branch Chief Ken Smith said.

There are still plastics that cannot be recycled, but the process has been simplified. Rather than focusing on the number inside a container's recycling symbol, which actually refers to the resin that the plastic was made of, it's best to consider weight and shape. Light, crinkly plastics cannot go into the totes because they will be flattened and missorted as paper. Similarly, small items like bottle caps or prescription bottles should be disposed of another way.

Items that contained food or dirt should be emptied and rinsed before recycling.

The changes to the JBLM program mirror those LeMay, Inc., the installation's recycling contractor, made to its Pierce County recycling program in April. What items can or cannot be recycled are frequently adapted to meet the changing market, and to increase the number of things that can easily be recycled.

"We have to look at everything we can take out of the waste stream," JBLM Solid Waste and Recycling Coordinator Shelia Albrecht-Martin said.

That's one of the added benefits to expanding the recycling program. By reducing the number of items sent from the base into landfills, JBLM gets closer to reaching its goal of becoming a net zero installation in waste — meaning it will reuse or recycle as much waste as it produces, bringing it to a zero sum.

The program is also saving the installation money. For every ton of waste brought to a landfill, the installation pays \$140. But for every ton of recycled material, JBLM earns \$62 from activities including selling scrap metal and or cardboard. That money goes to the Qualified Recycling Program, which supports Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation events and other quality of life programs on base.

All told, the gains from the simple act of rinsing a yogurt tub and tossing it in a recycling bin are high.

"Besides that it's the right thing to do, it's beneficial to the installation," Smith said.

For more information, or to obtain a gray recycling tote, call Shelia Albrecht-Martin at 966-6444.

Did you know?

What can go into curbside recycling bins:

Plastics (empty, rinsed, no lids) — plastic bottles, milk jugs, plastic tubs, plastic jars, buckets, plant pots Plastics are now sorted by shape, ignore numbers.

Items not accepted: lids, bags and wrap, crinkly and lightweight plastic

Paper and cardboard (clean, dry, rinse for milk and juice cartons) — milk and juice cartons, frozen food boxes, cardboard, paper bags, shredded paper, phone books, mail, magazines, mixed paper

Aluminum and tin cans (empty, rinsed, no loose lids, do not crush) — aluminum cans, metal cans

List compiled from www.piercecountwa.org/recycle

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