

Watsons and Baguio show us what happens to the plastic bottles you recycle

Our junior reporters head to a recycling plant to find out what is being done with Watsons water bottles to stop more plastic from filling up our landfills

Compiled by Tiffany Choi | September 23, 2016



The plastic waste needs to be checked and sorted before it can be processed in the recycling plant.

Photos: Tiffany Choi/SCMP

The problem of single-use plastic water bottles has long troubled environmentalists, as more and more plastic waste is sent to our landfills. However, some big companies are now looking at ways in which they can reverse this trend – or at least stop contributing to the amount of plastic that gets thrown away. Watsons invited a group of *Young Post* junior reporters to their recycling partner, Baguio, to see what they're doing to help save the environment.

Help save the planet

Single-use water bottles are made of plastic, which damages the environment when they're thrown away. Plastic products are slow to degrade and they contain chemicals which are released into the atmosphere. Watsons has appointed Baguio to be its recycling partner, collecting empty Watsons Reborn Bottles from stores all over the city. These bottles, which are made with 100 per cent recycled PET (Polyethylene terephthalate), will be sorted and processed in the plant to create a whole new Reborn Bottle. For every 1.42 bottles that are recycled, one new bottle can be made.

The brand manager of Watsons, Tracy Yuen, told us that Watsons isn't receiving as many bottles as they thought they would. She attributes this to the public being unaware of their scheme. In fact, it's not just the Reborn Bottles bought from Watsons that can be brought to the stores to be recycled.

"We accept any plastic bottles, including those from cosmetics as well. What's important is that they [the consumers] separate the cap, bottle and the sleeve for easy collecting and recycling," she said.

In return, the customer receives a 5 per cent discount coupon and an e-stamp. When you collect 10 stamps, you can join a WGO x Watsons environmental workshop for free. Freebies and the chance to do your bit to save the planet? Don't wait – bring your empty bottles to a store near you today.

Eunice Yip, Eva Chik and Jeanie Li



Cubes of compressed bottles are stacked in the yard ready to be taken away.

Photos: Tiffany Choi/SCMP

What goes on at the plant

At the plant, there is a sorting line where all the plastic bottles get sent first. If the waste isn't sorted before it reaches the plant, then all kinds of waste ends up here. The different plastics, like PE (Polyethylene), PET and PP (Polypropylene) needs to be sorted and placed into separate chutes.

The brown recycling bins should only contain recyclable waste, but we could see that normal rubbish, like tin cans, are thrown in there too. Once, the staff told us, they found lunch boxes containing ketchup. That sort of substance, if it gets into contact with the plastic waste, will contaminate what they want to recycle. When that happens they can't recycle any of it.

Next in the processing line is compressing the plastic. The bottles are sent into a compression machine and crushed into cubes for ease of transport. The cubes can be as big as 1m x 1m x 1.2m and can weigh over a tonne.

The trucks that deliver the cubes are weighed on a huge balance before and after the cubes are loaded onto them, which means that an estimate of the cubes' weight can be collected. The data is then sent to the government. They can use the data to analyse and track the recycling industry's performance.

Glass bottles are ground in a machine to make "glass sand" which is then used to produce glass bricks that can be used to pave roads.



Tracy Yuen tells us some interesting facts about how the Watsons Reborn Bottle is made from plastic waste.

Photos: Tiffany Choi/SCMP

Plastic bottles are compressed because it increases storage space. The demand for recycled material isn't always high, so sometimes the time between processing the plastic and an order for them to be collected changes. A tarp covers stacks of plastic cubes to protect them from the weather. The recycling centre's yard (an area of a few thousand square feet) is almost entirely covered by cubes of crushed plastic.

Recycling companies, mainly from the mainland, will further process the cubes of plastic into new products, such as the Watsons Reborn Bottle. The majority of recycled products in Hong Kong are manufactured on behalf of the government.

Cotrina Fung, Sarah Niu and Yam Wai-shan

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Recycling bottles is elementary, says Watsons