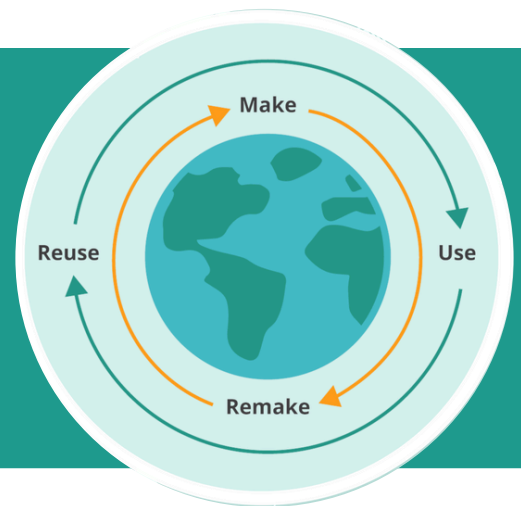


Properties of Plastics

#Eco360

Activity

Grade Level: 9-12



Main Objective

Learners will be able to discover various physical and chemical properties of common household plastics through an at home or in-class experiment.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, learners will:

- Understand the physical and chemical properties of different types of plastics
- Accurately record observations
- Communicate their results and think critically about the potential implications of what they mean within the circular economy process, and the environment

Length of Activity: 60 - 90 minutes

Step 1+2: Prepare and conduct the experiment

Step 3: Share findings

Materials Required

- Eco 360 notebook (we recommend asking learners to maintain a notebook for this program to write down reflections as they go through the program)
- Observation Tables Worksheet
- Solutions for Testing Density of Plastics Handout
- Information of Plastics Handout
- Samples of plastics coded with identifying numbers 1 through 6
- 70% isopropyl rubbing alcohol
- Light corn syrup
- Water
- Metric or standard measuring spoon
- Four small, plastic cups or bowls
- Candle and matches for flame test
- Tongs
- Beaker of water
- Fine-tipped permanent marker
- Scissors
- Plastic Bag
- Reusable bag
- Scale

Curriculum Connections

Alberta

Science 20 Unit A: Chemical Changes

- 20-A3.1k identify materials used in daily life that are based upon Alberta's petrochemical industry and that involve changes in energy

Grade 9 Unit C: Environmental Chemistry

- 3 - Analyze and evaluate mechanisms affecting the distribution of potentially harmful substances within an environment

Ontario

Grade 9 Chem (C1.1, C1.2, C2.2, C2.3, C3.4)

Activity

Step 1: Prepping the experiment

- Have the learners look around their house in a distance learning setting (you can ask learners to bring plastics to the school or go check out the recycling bins for in-class learning) to try and find plastics with the identifying numbers 1 through 6.
- Have learners take a few minutes to look at what they found. They should notice the difference between plastics. Some are smooth and malleable, while others are brittle and rigid. Some are clear, while others are opaque.
- Allow learners to reference the 'Information of Plastics Handout' as they are finding various plastic products in their house. It gives learners examples of each type of plastic as well as their associated formulas and structures.
- Learners will need to cut five sample pieces (four if no flame test is being conducted) of each of the six plastic containers they gathered into one- or two-inch squares. There should be a total 30 little pieces of plastic divided into each of the six groups.
- Learners will need to prepare the solutions linked [here](#), each in its own bowl labelled A, B, C, and D. These solutions will be used to test the physical property of relative density of each of the six different plastics. Note that for example, if type-1 plastic floats in all four solutions, it means that its density is less than the density of all the solutions. If it were to sink in two of the solutions and float in the other two, then its density is somewhere in between.
- A beaker of water needs to be prepared within the fume hood prior to the flame test.

Step 2: Conducting the experiment

- Have learners label each of the groups of plastics using the fine-tipped permanent marker with its corresponding number 1 through 6.
- Learners should record their observations using the Observation Table Worksheet, or by using their own created observation table. They should record the various physical properties for each of the groups of plastics including colour, clarity, hardness, odour, and malleability.
- Learners should place one of the five samples pieces of the type 1 plastic in the first solution A. Record whether or not it sinks or floats in the second observation table found [here](#). Continue testing the density for the remaining three solutions for the type 1 plastic. Repeat this process for the other five types of plastic samples. Learners should be able to determine the relative density based on these observations and referring to the density column of the known solutions.
- **Mechanical strength test:** Learners should find a plastic bag at their home for this test. Record the plastic code type of the bag (should be found at the bottom). Start by adding one item, to the plastic bag and weighing it on a scale (if the weight of the item is not picked up by the scale, then weigh yourself first, add the item to the bag, and weigh yourself again while holding the bag with the item, then subtract that new weight from the original weight to find the weight of the item). Continue adding items one by one and recording the total weight (remember your units) that is being held by the plastic bag. Please record when the plastic bag rips or can't hold anymore items. Repeat this process with a reusable grocery bag. If more items can be held then just extend the third observation table found [here](#).
 - Compare and contrast the differences and/or similarities of the bags.
 - What are reusable grocery bags made of or are there different kinds? Did yours have a recycle code on it? What allows it to be used more than once, and how is that better than a plastic bag?
- **Safety note for flame test:** Remind learners to be sure to use care when conducting the following part of the experiment. This test should only be done in a fume hood at school, (it can be removed from the observation table). Be sure to remind learners to not breathe in the smoke produced by the burning of plastic.
- **Flame test:** Using tongs, hold the last remaining plastic sample from each group individually over a lighted candle. Observe and record the flame and smoke colour in the first observation table found [here](#). This property that learners are testing for is known as combustibility (an object's ability to burst into flames), and it is a chemical property. Chemical properties differ to physical ones because they deal with an objects ability to change or produce a new substance. Learners will be able to see that smoke is being produced when heat is being added to the plastics.
- Discard the plastic into the pail of water to ensure all the flames are extinguished. Repeat this process for the remaining samples from each group.

Step 3: Conclusion

Have learners answer or discuss as a class these questions.

- Share your findings and compare the differences between the plastics.
- Imagine doing this experiment again and not knowing the groups of plastics for each. Do you think you would be able to identify each plastic sample based on only the physical and chemical properties? Why or why not?
- How do you think recycling companies test for unknown plastics to determine their identity?