

Biodegradable and compostable packaging: As green as we think?



Because it's not always "the thought that counts"

Although efforts to market products with minimal impact to the environment are laudable, biodegradable and compostable packaging are not a panacea, as the buzz surrounding them would suggest. That is what a report prepared jointly by ÉEQ and Solinov, a consulting firm specializing in environment and organic materials recovery management, reveals.

[Read the report >>](#)

The fate of compostable plastic packaging in various streams

Biodegradable and compostable packaging are not compatible with or adapted to all processing streams.

What happens with compostable packaging placed in:

Organic materials bin	Recyclable materials bin: (containers, packaging and printed matter)	Trash	Yard waste
<p>Very difficult to differentiate from other plastics that are removed in order not to affect the quality of the compost.</p> <p>—</p> <p>If it does not break down fast enough, it will be removed and sent to landfill.</p>	<p>Very difficult to differentiate from other plastics</p> <p>—</p> <p>If sorted, it will be removed and sent to landfill.</p> <p>—</p> <p>If not sorted, it is a source of contamination for conventional plastics.</p>	<p>At landfill, it is compacted and not exposed to the conditions required for composting, so it is treated as any other trash.</p>	<p>As it is not designed to turn into compost directly in nature, it becomes litter.</p> <p>—</p> <p>It needs specific conditions and processing steps to be able to break down.</p>

Need to know



1.

The words "biodegradable" and "compostable" printed on a packaging are an **environmental claim that is not verified by a third party** (except if the packaging is certified). Therefore, it's fair to question the actual biodegradability or compostability of a packaging identified as such by its producer.

2.

Existing certifications to confirm that a product is suitable for composting **are voluntary and carried out in labs** under specific and controlled conditions that are different from those in the field.

3.

Because these environmental claims **create confusion**, consumers make sorting mistakes, and compostable packaging end up **in all municipal collections**: garbage, organic materials, recyclable materials and sometimes out in nature (so-called litter). In the end, a large share of that packaging may well end up in landfills.

4.

Contrary to the recycling stream, **the mission of the composting and anaerobic digestion stream is not to manage packaging or sort materials**. It aims to produce quality compost or digestate that can be returned to the ground.

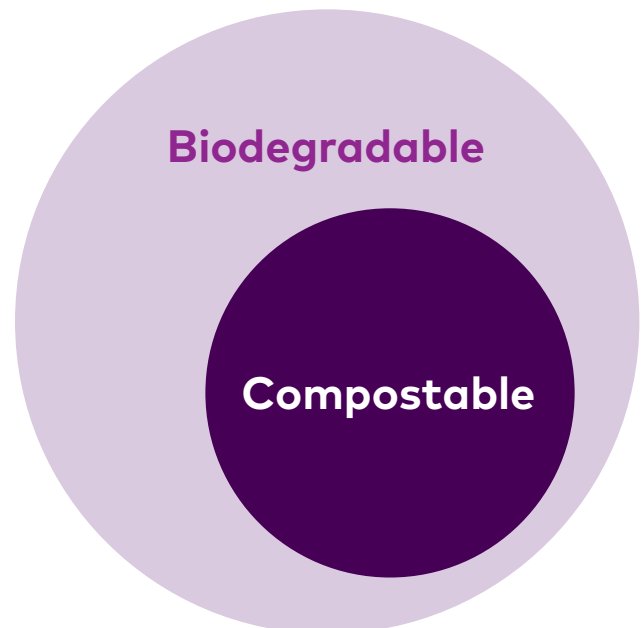
Biodegradable and compostable plastic packaging - What's the difference?

Two main differences:

1. Biodegradation time:

The degradation time of compostable plastics should be comparable to that of food and green residues, whereas biodegradable plastics have no degradation time scale.

2. Effect on the environment: Contrary to biodegradable plastics, broken down compostable plastics should not leave visible, identifiable or toxic residues.



Remember

Compostable plastics are biodegradable, but not all biodegradable plastics are compostable.



Ecodesign and Circular Economy

Our Ecodesign and Circular Economy team facilitates access to ecodesign for companies that place packaging on the market.

[View our service offering >>](#)

Marketing true ecodesigned packaging

The example of compostable packaging clearly shows the importance of using ecodesign to gain an overall view of the factors that need to be taken into account in the packaging design process. It's even more important in the context of the **modernization of curbside recycling**, where companies will be responsible for the packaging they place on the market.

[I want to know more about packaging ecodesign >>](#)

Myth

Compostable packaging is not subject to the Compensation plan as it is not processed by the recycling streams. Therefore, I don't need to include them in my report to Éco Entreprises Québec.

Reality

All containers, packaging and printed matter for Quebec consumers **are designated**. Biodegradable or compostable packaging must therefore be included in the report.



Coming in May

Webinar

Biodegradable and compostable packaging: GREENER on the other side

For more info:
eeq.ca