

Target one - Eliminating problem plastics - Frequently asked questions

Introduction

The UK Plastics Pact is a trailblazing, collaborative initiative delivered by WRAP that will create a circular economy for plastics. It brings together the entire plastics packaging value chain behind a common vision and ambitious set of targets to 2025.

Members take independent decisions on how to approach each of the problematic plastics based on their individual business needs.

These frequently asked questions support the publication of [eliminating problem plastics report](#).

How do you define disposable plastic cutlery - does this include multi-packs or just single items used in cafes/ food to go areas?

- This includes all disposable (designed to be used once) plastic cutlery - including multi-packs sold and single cutlery items provided loose in cafes/front of store and in snack pots. These will be impacted by the EU Plastics Directive.

How do you define disposable plastic bowls and plates?

- Single-use, disposable tableware (e.g. packs of disposable party bowls and plates). It doesn't include plastic tableware which is intended to be washed & re-used on multiple occasions (e.g. melamine outdoor dining sets or washable & re-usable children's plates/bowls sets).

Are recyclable plates/bowls (e.g. PET or PP) included in the elimination list? Why if they are recyclable?

- Yes these are also included and will be banned by the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive¹. Despite being recyclable these items are deemed unnecessary as there are re-usable/washable alternatives available. When used 'on-the-go' (e.g. at picnics) the facilities to recycle are commonly not available. We would encourage people to use re-usable options.

Are compostable PLA plates/ bowls also included in the elimination list?

- Yes, as with conventional plastic plates & bowls - these will be banned by the EU Plastics Directive and are deemed unnecessary as re-usable alternatives are available and the facility to compost them on-the go is not commonly available.

Are disposable plastic cups also on the list?

- Plastic cups have not been included in the phase one list of items to eliminate but are on the list of further items under investigation. Disposable plastic cups may be used in some circumstances for reasons of hygiene. For example, drinking fountains may provide such cups and a recycling bin. However, we would encourage re-usable options to be used where possible.

¹ https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-2631_en.htm

Plastic straws – does this include straws on cartons too?

- As with the UK Government ban, this includes all single-use straws including those sold in packs and those provided with drinks containers/cartons. The government has allocated a deadline of June 2021 to give the industry the extra time needed to find an alternative solution. This has been noted in the report, highlighting that in some cases, additional time is needed to develop solutions.

Plastic straws - Is this just disposable plastic straws or reusable ones too?

- Straws which are clearly designed to be washed and re-used are out of scope.

Does polystyrene cover expanded polystyrene (EPS) and well as high impact polystyrene (HIPS)?

- Yes both EPS and HIPS are included in the elimination. Post-consumer (collected from households) polystyrene is not widely recycled. Expanded polystyrene is problematic in the recycling process as it can contaminate the paper recycling stream. Expanded polystyrene food containers are being banned under the EU Single-use Plastics Directive.

Does the elimination of polystyrene packaging include all that is placed on the market?

- The scope of elimination is only household (post-consumer) material. This is packaging that enters consumer's homes and is collected for recycling by local authorities. This material is currently not being recycled. WRAP is aware that polystyrene is used in the supply chain (business to business) and this is out of scope of the 'elimination' as WRAP understands that there is a greater opportunity for this to be recycled. In addition to this, some companies provide take-back services for expanded polystyrene of consumer goods e.g. packaging removed and taken back by the company for recycling at the point of delivery. In this case, the material is out of scope for elimination since it is not entering the household recycling.

PVC – clingfilm – is this included in the elimination list?

- Clingfilm is in the further items under investigation table. Recommended approach is to use non-PVC cling-film or for consumers to use re-usable alternatives.

PVC used in healthcare/ pharmaceutical packaging - unlikely to achieve the 2020 deadline

- The report makes note of the fact that some items may take longer to find an alternative material or replacement for e.g. where technological innovation is required, for example in pharmaceutical packaging.

Is PVdC included in the list of 8 items to be eliminated?

- PVdC is not included in the phase one list of eight items, but, as a multi-layer non-recyclable plastic, it is considered to be a problematic material requiring investigation (per the appendix to our report) owing to the contamination issue it causes in mechanical recycling systems. This is recognised in industry guidance². However, PVdC also has certain beneficial uses in some circumstances. PVdC can be used as a barrier in food packaging and since the environmental impact of food waste is higher than that of the packaging, removal of/substituting it, or alleviating potential negative impacts during recycling should be carefully considered in order to mitigate the risk of increased food waste. It is recognised that there are technical challenges and solutions needed to be developed in order to remove/substitute it. Chemical recycling processes in time may offer solutions to the recycling of PVdC. This means it is likely to take longer than the target date at the end of 2020 to move out of PVdC.

Why are tea bags in scope?

- Tea bags are often recycled along with food waste. Therefore it is important that UK Plastics Pact members are playing their role to make these fully compostable in order to avoid contaminating soil. A number of brands have already moved to compostable tea bags.

Wet wipes - why are these not included?

- Wet wipes are currently out of scope of The UK Plastics Pact. Problems and solutions for them are likely to be similar to other absorbent hygiene products (AHP) like nappies.
- Solutions may include:
 - Re-useable alternatives.
 - Using bio-based materials which are environmentally preferable when sent to energy from waste facilities.
 - Separate recycling collections (alongside other absorbent hygiene products)
- WRAP encourages businesses to educate citizens not to flush wet wipes down toilets.

Why is the target deadline the end of 2020?

The UK Government ban on plastic straws, cotton buds and stirrers comes into effect in April 2020 and the EU Plastics Directive in 2021. UK Plastics Pact members are encouraged to be early adopters of these legislative requirements. The target elimination date for this first phase of materials/items has been set at the end of 2020 in order to demonstrate that urgent action is being taken. We would ask Pact members to prioritise work on these items and work as quickly as possible to remove these from their portfolio where it is appropriate to do so, whilst recognising that some items may take longer than others.

² Plastics Recyclers Europe <https://plasticsrecyclers.eu/sites/default/files/2018-05/PE%20Transparent%20Natural%20Flexible%20films%20guidelines%2015-12-2017.pdf>

What happens if UK Plastics Pact members do not meet the deadline by the end of 2020?

- UK Plastics Pact members are signed up to achieve the overall targets by 2025, including Target one to eliminate problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging items. However, progress will be incremental and that is why WRAP is asking members to take action on the items identified in phase one in advance of that, ideally by the end of 2020 wherever possible. However, in some cases owing to technical, economical or practical challenges, this will not be possible and WRAP acknowledges this.