

Press release

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UK Plastics Pact cuts unnecessary plastic by 40% and increases plastic recycling by 107,000 tonnes

WRAP today publishes its second annual report for The UK Plastics Pact showing that members have made some good progress against targets, including a reduction in the amount of plastic packaging being used, and good progress in plastic recycling at home. But warns the charity's Chief Executive Marcus Gover, there are significant challenges ahead which need urgent attention to keep the UK on course.

Marcus Gover, "It's great to see UK Plastics Pact members cutting unnecessary plastic packaging by 40% and increasing recycling to 50% in just one year. This was exactly why we set up the Pact - to tackle problematic plastic, increase re-use and recycling, and stop plastic polluting the environment. I am delighted with the progress and very pleased to see leading businesses trialling refill and reuse alternatives."

The 2019 UK Plastics Pact data show:

- **Target 1** - 400 million items classed as problematic or unnecessary were sold by Pact members in 2019 (a 40% reduction from 2018)*
- **Target 2** - 64% of plastic packaging placed on the market by Pact members continues to be recyclable**
- **Target 3** - The amount of plastic packaging recycled in the UK has increased from 44% in 2018 to 50% in 2019
- **Target 4** - Average recycled content has increased from 9% in 2018 to 13% in 2019.***

Target 1 -

- 400 million "problematic and unnecessary items" classified under Target 1 were sold by Pact members in 2019. Most Pact members are on track to **eliminate 6 of the 8 items and materials** classified as "problematic and unnecessary items" under Target 1 by the end of this year. The estimated tonnage of this material sold was 16,000 tonnes, showing a **30% reduction** on 2018 levels.
- While the amount of PVC has more than halved over this time period, from the outset it was clear that in some applications it would not be possible to remove PVC in the time period e.g. when used in pharmaceutical packaging where the product is licensed with the packaging.
- Polystyrene remains an issue - Pact members need to proactively remove polystyrene, for example **Danone** has invested in new technologies to produce yogurt pots from PET or PP. Their new PET pots are recyclable and crucially allow recycled plastic content to be incorporated back into the pots.
- Members reporting in 2018 and 2019 show a **6%** reduction in plastic packaging placed on the market. Actions taken by members to address unnecessary packaging include the joint initiative by **Heinz** and **Tesco** removing shrink film from multi-packs of tinned foods and **PepsiCo** reducing excess headspace in multi-packs of several leading brands of crisps.

Target 2 -

- Today, **64%** of plastic packaging placed on the market by Pact members is recyclable. WRAP urges Pact members across the value chain to improve this significantly by ensuring that flexible plastic packaging is **widely recyclable** in the UK.

- Several brands and supermarkets are making inroads to reusables and refill including **Asda**, which collaborated with **Taylor's of Harrogate**, **PepsiCo** and **Unilever** with seven brands including **Persil**, **PG Tips** and **Radox** to launch its pilot sustainability store in 2020. Among plastic reduction and recycling initiatives, it offers common everyday items, personal care products and laundry products in refillable formats. Asda estimate that the initiatives being trialled will save **one million** pieces of plastic per year. More trial results need to be shared across Pact members to show how reuse and refill can be commercially viable and scalable by 2025.
- Aligned with The UK Plastic Pact polymer choice guidance, members are beginning to make the changes necessary to design their packaging for greater recyclability. Many members have removed non-recyclable black plastic including **Quorn**. Iconic designs have been altered to improve recyclability such as **Suntory Beverage and Food GB&I** brand **Ribena**.

Target 3 -

- The amount of plastic packaging that is being recycled **increased** from **44%** in 2018 to **50%** in 2019. That's an additional 107,000 tonnes no longer being burned or buried. The number of local authorities collecting plastic pots/tubs/trays increased from **79%** in 2018 to **84%** in 2019 across the UK, while all continue to collect plastic bottles.
- More people than ever before are recycling, with WRAP's latest citizen research showing that almost nine in ten (**87%**) of UK households **regularly** recycle.
- Brands and retailers continue to promote positive recycling behaviours. Examples include **Coca-Cola** which has created space on its bottle labels to communicate recycling messaging to citizens on pack. **Morrisons** has included front of pack recycling messaging across many ranges to inform and encourage customers to bring PE film back to store for recycling.
- There has been important investment in the recycling sector by Pact members. **Jayplas** has invested in a plastic film recycling plant with 100k tonnes of capacity. **Veolia**, in collaboration with **Charpak** and **Unilever**, will develop the UK's first dual PET bottle and tray recycling facility.

Target 4 -

- Average recycled content is now **13%**, having **risen from 9%** in 2018. This equates to 700,000 barrels of new (virgin) oil and 66,000 tonnes of CO₂e. We have a long way to go to reach our 30% target, but this is still a positive move.
- Member actions include **Coca-Cola**, who moved all PET bottles to **50%** rPET content across all core brands. **Waitrose** launched new packaging for its 'treat tubs' made from **90%** recycled material and **Unilever's** new **Magnum** tubs and lids for its 'pints range' are made with recycled polypropylene (rPP).

WRAP CEO Marcus Gover, "Of course we will always need to do more to deliver our bold ambition for 2025. I am looking forward to UK Plastics Pact members eliminating more unnecessary plastic and further increasing the recyclability of packaging in 2021. Developing solutions to overcome the challenges of recycling flexible plastic packaging will be a particular priority. Collection points for plastic bags and films at supermarkets will be an important step in the right direction, but we need all supermarkets to collect all plastic films to make this work. Together we can. Together we will."

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow, "I'm very pleased to see the progress of The UK Plastics Pact which is tackling one of the greatest threats to our environment, and I thank all those involved who are working on this vital project.

"We must continue to go further and faster to tackle unnecessary plastic, and that's why we have recently banned the supply of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds and confirmed the extension of the single-use carrier bag charge to all retailers, which has already cut sales by 95% in the main supermarkets.

"Our landmark Environment Bill will also give us powers to introduce deposit return schemes for drinks containers and extended producer responsibility for packaging. From 2022 we will also introduce a world-leading tax on plastic packaging which doesn't meet a minimum threshold of at least 30% recycled content."

Ends

Notes to editors

- The UK Plastics Pact is the first such initiative in the world working to create a circular economy for plastics. It brings together businesses from across the entire plastics value chain with UK governments and NGOs to tackle plastic waste. The UK annual report can be found here: <https://www.wrap.org.uk/resources/report/uk-plastics-pact-annual-report-2019-20>. Find out more about The UK Plastics Pact: <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/the-uk-plastics-pact>
 - **Target 1** - Eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use plastic packaging through redesign, innovation or alternative (re-use) delivery models:
 - **Target 2** - 100% of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable:
 - **Target 3** - 70% of plastic packaging effectively recycled or composted:
 - **Target 4** - 30% average recycled content across all plastic packaging:
- *These numbers are based on members who reported in both 2018 and 2019 to give a meaningful data comparison. New members since the 2018 data submission are not included in this figure.
- ** 2018 baseline data has been recalculated due to the discovery of data quality issues from two members which they were unable to correct. Target 2 baseline has moved from 65% to 63%.
- *** Two historic 2018 data submissions were redacted on request from members who had discovered data quality issues they were unable to correct. This means that we have revised the baseline for Target 4 from 10% to 9%.
- WRAP is an environmental charity that works with governments, businesses and individuals to ensure that the world's natural resources are used sustainably. It's the charity leading The UK Plastics Pact, a world first initiative, as well as Love Food Hate Waste, the Courtauld Commitment, Sustainable Clothing Action Plan, Textiles 2030 and Recycle Now. WRAP works collaboratively and develops and delivers evidence-based, impactful solutions to reduce the environmental cost of the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the plastic packaging we use. Founded in 2000 in the UK, WRAP now works throughout the world and is a Global Alliance Partner of The Royal Foundation's Earthshot Prize.
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