

Plans unveiled to ban single-use plastics

Polluting plastics which harm our landscapes and wildlife could be banned in England, Environment Secretary George Eustice set out today.

Single-use plastic plates, cutlery, expanded and extruded polystyrene cups and food and beverage containers could all be phased out, in the latest Government bid to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste.

According to estimates, England uses 1.1 billion single-use plates and 4.25 billion items of single-use cutlery – most of which are plastic – per year, but only 10% are recycled upon disposal. Under proposals in a 12-week public consultation, businesses and consumers will need to move towards more sustainable alternatives.

The Government is going further by also launching a separate call for evidence to address other sources of plastic pollution. This will ask stakeholders for views on tackling commonly littered plastics such as wet wipes, tobacco filters, sachets and other single-use cups.

Future policy measures that could be explored include banning plastic in these items, and mandatory labelling on packaging to help consumers dispose of these items correctly.

The Government will also examine how we can put the responsibility firmly at manufacturers' doors to make sure they are doing everything they can to tackle single-use plastics, including litter from cigarette butts.

The UK uses 2.5 billion disposable coffee cups per year, while plastic sachets are often not recycled due to their small size, which makes it hard to segregate and clean them. The Government will consider how a move to sustainable alternatives can be achieved without unfairly impacting on consumers.

Many companies are already taking action to cut this avoidable waste, with many shops already stocking alternatives to conventional plastic wipes, and today's move will urge more to do the same.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Plastic damages our environment and destroys wildlife. This Government has waged war on unnecessary, wasteful plastics – banning the supply of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds, while our carrier bag charge has cut consumption by 95% in the main supermarkets.

But it's time we left our throwaway culture behind once and for all. Through our world-leading Environment Act, we will reduce

waste and make better use of our resources, helping us to build back greener and leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

These new plans represent the next major step in eradicating the use of problematic plastics that pollute our natural world.

The consultation comes a week after the passage of the Environment Act which will enable tougher action on single-use plastics in England. The Act includes powers to place charges on single-use items, and the call to evidence will explore whether such a charge could be placed on single use cups or sachets to encourage a shift away from throwaway culture.

The UK is a global leader in combatting plastic waste and has already taken major steps to tackle plastic pollution, banning microbeads in rinse-off personal care products, and restricting the supply of single-use plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds.

Following the huge success of the 5p charge on single-use carrier bags, which cut consumption in the main supermarkets by 95% since 2015, we increased the minimum charge to 10p and [extended it to all retailers](#), ensuring we can take billions more bags out of circulation.

Industry is addressing plastic waste through the UK Plastics Pact, a collaboration between businesses from across the entire plastics value chain, supported by the government and coordinated by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP).

David Scott, Corporate Affairs Director at Morrisons, said:

Reducing plastic packaging is one of the top issues our customers care about. We want to help customers live their lives with less reliance on plastic. We've already banned many single use plastics across our stores – including plastic plates, cutlery and straws, and we've developed recycling systems for soft plastics.

Only this week we've announced we're building a new soft plastic recycling site here in the UK. So we welcome Defra's consultation and look forward to working with the whole of the industry on it.

Marcus Gover, CEO WRAP, said:

We welcome the consultation to expand the range of single-use plastic items to be banned in England. Eliminating problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic is essential if we are to turn the tide on plastic pollution and keep plastic out of the environment.

The UK Plastics Pact set an ambitious target to take action in this important area and its members have already eliminated problematic

plastic by more than 40%. We now need regulation to follow and ensure that all businesses take steps to eliminate problematic and unnecessary plastic.

Steve Hynd, City to Sea's Policy Manager said:

Today's announcement to ban some of the most polluting single-use plastic is hugely welcome. Almost 100,000 people signed our petition earlier this year calling on Government to take urgent action and we're pleased to see the public's concerns being taken seriously.

There is a long journey ahead in tackling plastic pollution, but this is a positive and important first step.

Despite the action taken so far on plastics, it remains widespread and its inappropriate disposal causes environmental damage. A plastic item used for a few minutes can persist in the environment for hundreds of years and endanger wildlife and habitats. When broken down into microplastics, it reaches our soils, waterways, ocean and food chains within them. Around the world, more than one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals and turtles die every year from eating or getting tangled in plastic waste.

Through the Environment Act, the Government is bringing in a wide range of further measures to tackle plastic pollution and litter, including:

- Introducing a [Deposit Return Scheme](#) for drinks containers to recycle billions more plastic bottles and stop them being landfilled, incinerated, or littered. Through a small deposit placed on drinks products, the DRS will incentivise people to recycle;
- Our [Extended Producer Responsibility](#) scheme will mean packaging producers will be expected to cover the cost of recycling and disposing of their packaging.
- Our plans for [Consistent Recycling Collections](#) for every household and business in England will ensure more plastic is recycled.

We will also introduce a world-leading [plastic packaging tax](#) from April 2022, set at £200 per tonne, on plastic packaging which doesn't meet a minimum threshold of at least 30% recycled content. This will encourage greater use of recycled plastic, leading to increased levels of recycling and plastic waste collection, helping to tackle the problem of plastic waste and protect our environment.

Plastic pollution is a global issue and we are committed to working with international partners to tackle it. That's why the UK is co-sponsoring an ambitious resolution proposed by Peru and Rwanda to start negotiations for a new legally binding global agreement to tackle plastic pollution in the way the Paris Agreement has done for climate change and the Montreal protocol has done for ozone depletion.