

Single-use plastics: Presidency reaches provisional agreement with Parliament

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The EU is fighting marine plastic pollution

The EU is taking action to reduce plastic pollution by setting tough new restrictions on certain single-use plastic products. The presidency of the Council today reached a provisional agreement with the European Parliament on a new directive which is part of the EU's efforts to protect the environment and reduce marine litter.

The single-use plastics directive builds on the EU's existing waste legislation but goes further by setting even stricter rules for those types of products and packaging which are among the top ten most frequently found items polluting European beaches. The new rules will ban the use of certain throwaway plastic products for which alternatives exist. In addition, specific measures will be introduced to reduce the use of the most frequently littered plastic products.

Marine litter is a growing global problem. We have all heard the warning by the World Economic Forum and others that, measured by weight, there will be more plastic than fish in the world's oceans by 2050 if we continue dumping plastic in the sea at the present rate. We cannot let this happen. This is why the EU takes action to restrict the use of certain throwaway plastic products for which good plastic-free alternatives exist. And we will make plastic producers pay for cleaning up.

Elisabeth Köstinger, Austrian federal minister of sustainability and tourism

Single-use plastic products are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once or for a short period of time before they are thrown away. The design of plastic products should always take into account the reusability and recyclability of the product.

One of the main purposes of this directive is to reduce the amount of plastic waste which we create. Where possible, the measures laid down in this directive and their implementation should give priority to waste prevention

or to the transition to re-usable products rather than to other single-use alternatives.

The following products will be banned in the EU:

- Plastic cutlery (forks, knives, spoons and chopsticks)
- Plastic plates
- Plastic straws
- Food containers made of expanded polystyrene, such as fast food boxes, with or without a cover, used to contain food that is intended for immediate consumption either on-the-spot or take-away, and that is ready to be consumed without any further preparation, like cooking, boiling or heating
- Beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene
- Cups for beverages made of expanded polystyrene
- Products made from oxo-degradable plastic: this term refers to plastic materials which contain additives that promote oxidation of that plastic into micro fragments under aerobic conditions. This type of plastic contributes to microplastic pollution in the environment, is not compostable and negatively affects the recycling of conventional plastic.
- Cotton bud sticks made of plastic

In addition, member states will take the necessary measures to achieve a measurable quantitative reduction in the consumption of the following products:

- Food containers made of plastic, such as fast food boxes, with or without a cover, used to contain food that is intended for immediate consumption either on-the-spot or take-away, and that is ready to be consumed without any further preparation, like cooking, boiling or heating.
- Plastic cups for beverages, including their covers and lids

There will be a binding target of at least 25% of recycled plastic for PET beverage bottles from 2025 onwards, calculated as an average for the member state. In 2030 all plastic bottles will have to respect a target of at least 30% of recycled content.

Wet wipes, i.e. pre-wetted personal care and domestic wipes, will need to bear a marking on their packaging which informs consumers of the presence of plastic in the wet wipe and of the harm done to the environment if it is thrown away elsewhere than in the bin.

Producers of tobacco filters which contain plastic will be subject to an extended producer responsibility scheme. This means that producers will have to cover the costs for public collection systems for cigarette stubs, including the necessary infrastructure such as appropriate waste receptacles in common litter hotspots.

Tobacco product filters containing plastic are the second most littered single-use plastic items in the EU. Innovation and product development are

expected to provide viable alternatives to filters containing plastic, and the co-legislators agree that this development needs to be accelerated. Cigarettes and other tobacco products which have filters that contain plastic will need to bear a marking on their packaging which informs consumers of the presence of plastic and of the harm done to the environment if the cigarette stubs are thrown away elsewhere than in the bin.

Background and next steps

The proposal under discussion is part of the EU's plastics strategy. The European Commission has presented this draft directive in late May 2018. Environment ministers discussed the proposal at their meetings on 25 June and on 9 October. The Council reached its position on 31 October and began trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament on 6 November which ended in a provisional agreement today.

If this agreement is confirmed by EU ambassadors of member states, the directive can be submitted for approval to the European Parliament and then back to the Council for final adoption.

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