

PLASTIC PACKAGING BAN 'COULD HARM ENVIRONMENT'

A report by UK charity and think tank Green Alliance says that companies are under “considerable” pressure to move away from single-use plastics, but shifts towards other materials could actually be harming the environment.

Based on interviews from leading UK supermarkets and brands, the report says that a lack of government direction has resulted in a disjointed approach to solving plastic waste and that these differing approaches from various companies can be “incompatible”.

The report pushes for direct intervention by government to develop a strategy for sustainable plastic alternatives. One supermarket representative told the authors that competitors are reluctant to share information, saying: “Packaging technology innovations can be quite the competitive advantage in the current climate” currently.

Widespread confusion continues about how packaging is reprocessed after use. The report states that 80% of consumers think biodegradable or compostable plastic is environmentally friendly, but there is little understanding of what the terms mean and how the material should be dealt with. This will have major ramifications for brands when extended producer responsibility for packaging is brought into law, as part of the new Environment Bill, as businesses will pay for 100% of costs for dealing with packaging material when it becomes waste, as opposed to around 10% currently.



PLASTIC STRAW BAN MAY BE DELAYED UNTIL SUMMER

It has been reported by Footprint, that the ban on plastic straws, due to come into force in April, is likely to be delayed.



The Queen’s speech, in December 2019, reiterated the April deadline, but those close to government-industry discussions told Footprint that Defra is now briefing that it is more likely to be the summer.

Furthermore, there is believed to be feeling in the department that many of the dates set out in the government’s Resources and Waste Strategy are ambitious.

Young shoppers are worried about plastic packaging but aren't changing habits



Research conducted by Green Alliance found that 48% of shoppers aged between 18 and 34 claimed to have turned away from their regular food brands, citing ‘attitude to packaging’ for the switch.

However, supermarket representatives claimed shoppers’ buying habits were not reflecting their claims. Lack of suitable alternatives has meant that seven of the UK’s 10 biggest supermarkets increased their plastic footprint last year.

“A lot more consumers are saying that they are already avoiding what they understand as single use plastics – that is a clear and consistent trend coming through our research,” said one unnamed brand.

UKRI LAUNCHES 2 SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING FUNDING COMPETITIONS WORTH £8M



Two competitions, for up to £8million of public funding, to develop more sustainable plastic packaging have been launched by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The money is intended to develop recycling systems that can cope with rising volumes of recyclable materials and analyse how package design impacts consumer behaviour.

The first competition called 'Enabling Research' aims to promote academic-led research, and will welcome significant industry participation and co-investment.

The second competition, led by UKRI's offshoot, Innovate UK, is for early-stage smart and sustainable plastic packaging to make the supply chain more circular.

PACKAGING DATA SUGGESTS 2019 TARGETS MET



The latest provisional monthly packaging data, published by the Environment Agency, suggests that all materials have comfortably met their 2019 packaging targets.

Earlier in the year, there had been concerns that plastic and aluminium could both miss their respective targets, following a shortfall in the first quarter of the year.

Some in the sector, however, see this as only being achieved because of particularly high prices for aluminium and plastic PRNs. Concerns remain that prices for PRNs, particularly plastics, could rise above the £500 mark this year. A compliance fee might be introduced if, for example, a business or scheme couldn't obtain sufficient PRNs, which might take some of the price pressure out of the market.

Asda launches self-fill trial

A store in Leeds will become the first Asda in the UK where shoppers can fill up their own containers of products, including Asda's own-brand coffee, rice and pasta.

The retailer is also working with its suppliers on the 3-month trial to reduce plastic, meaning shoppers will also be able to use refill points for Kellogg's cereals and Unilever's PG Tips tea. The store will also offer plastic-free flowers, loose produce and a range of new recycling facilities, including a reverse vending machine for plastic bottles and cans, hanger recycling and a deposit box for unwanted small plastic toys.



Nestlé to "create market" for food-grade recycled plastics

To lead the shift from virgin plastics to food-grade recycled plastics, Nestlé has committed up to 2 million tonnes of food-grade recycled plastics and allocating more than £1.2bn to pay a premium for these materials between now and 2025.

The company will also reportedly launch a £120m sustainable packaging venture fund to invest in start-up companies that focus on these areas.

Online tool launched to monitor uptake of recycled polymers



Monitoring Recyclates for Europe (MORE) is now available for use by UK reprocessors and converters to register the uptake of recycled polymers into products. The online tool is designed to monitor the industry's efforts to reach the EU target of 10m tonnes of recycled polymers used annually between 2025 and 2030.

The IT platform was developed by European Plastics Converters (EuPC), the EU-level trade association, in cooperation with its members. Alexandre Dangis of EuPC and Philip Law of the British Plastics Federation, officially signed the MORE Partnership Agreement in November 2019.