



SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

A FU⁺UREPLUS GUIDE



+ HOW ARE PLASTICS MADE?

Plastic has a **whole lifecycle** that we often don't think about when using plastic products. Plastic is made from **fossil fuels**, like oil, natural gas or coal, which are refined into ethane and propane, treated with heat, and combined together to create different polymers.

Extracting those fossil fuels and turning them into plastics creates a huge amount of **pollution** and **greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions** – from transportation and refining, to production methods, distribution, consumption, and finally, disposal.

+ WHY IS THERE SO MUCH PLASTIC?

Plastic has completely revolutionised our world and is entwined into almost every aspect of modern life. It is sterile, light-weight, long-lasting, malleable, affordable and reusable. A completely transformative product, it helps to save lives in the form of medical equipment, keeps our food fresh, improves our safety, and is used to create convenient, affordable products and solutions for billions of people.

We produce around **300 million tonnes** of plastic waste **every year**, but the current rate of global plastic production comes with **severe environmental consequences**.

What are single-use plastics?

Single-use plastic items are designed to be disposed of immediately after use, such as drinks bottles, food wrappers, straws, surgical gloves and plastic bags.

They represent a stark example of the environmental problems associated with a throwaway culture, prioritising convenience over durability, with little considerations of the long-term impacts. A single-use drinks bottle, for example, made of a type of plastic known as PET (polyethylene terephthalate) will take an estimated 450 years to decompose if sent to landfill.



+ FACTS & FIGURES

- **One million** plastic drinking bottles are purchased **every minute** around the world, and **five trillion** single-use plastic bags are used **every year**.
- Researchers estimate that only around **9%** of all plastic waste ever produced has been **recycled**.
- About **12%** has been **incinerated**, releasing toxic gases into the atmosphere.
- The remaining **79%** has ended up in **landfills** or has been discarded into the natural environment.
- Around **8 million tonnes** of plastic ends up in the world's **oceans** every year, mainly carried out to sea via rivers originating in cities and urban areas.
- Plastics can persist in the environment for centuries. They break down very slowly into smaller and smaller pieces, eventually becoming **microplastics**, which can be ingested by animals, fish, or birds and end up on our plates and in our drinking water.
- Scientists predict that by **2050**, there will be **more** plastic than fish in our oceans.

+ REDUCING SINGLE-USE PLASTICS FROM YOUR BUSINESS

Businesses have a **huge** role to play in adopting more sustainable consumption and disposal habits when it comes to single-use plastics, and encouraging their customers, employees and suppliers to do the same.

For many businesses, single-use plastic is an integral part of their operations. There has been a lot of **positive** action on plastics in recent years, but we need to do more if we are to change how we **design, use and reuse** plastics.

The following pages will outline some of the actions your business can take to reduce its use of single-use plastics.

+ OFFICE SUPPLIES & MORE...

- If you provide single-use bottles, cups, sachets, straws, stirrers, plates or cutlery for staff or customers, can they be replaced with reusables?
- Encourage staff to bring a reusable water bottle, coffee cup and shopping bag into the office every day.
- Avoiding takeaway lunches in single-use plastic bags or polystyrene packaging is another quick win.
- Have the office milk delivered in reusable bottles.
- Ditch or reduce clingfilm use and replace with a compostable alternative, or use reusable containers.
- Source biodegradable/compostable takeaway packaging if you are selling food to go.
- Look for biodegradable bin liners – they are widely available.
- Source organic, non-plastic or biodegradable sanitary products.
- Speak to your dry cleaner/laundry service about alternatives to plastic film coverings.

+ RESPONSIBLE DISPOSAL

- Make sure that all of your operational sites have a **plastic recycling system**.
- Check with your **waste provider** to see what can and can't be recycled – it can vary greatly in different countries and regions.
- There are various free single-use plastic **recycling schemes** available in the UK for hard to recycle waste streams.
- Make sure you are recycling **printer cartridges** and **water filter cartridges**. Many retailers offer a free return service.



+ PACKAGING

Packaging is one of the biggest single-use plastic challenges for organisations. Carry out an **annual assessment** of the regular products you buy and speak to suppliers about changing or minimising the packaging, or look for other options.

If you are packing your own products in single-use plastics, can you look for alternatives, reduce the amount you are using, or include information for your customers on how to recycle?

Government regulation around plastic use is becoming more stringent, notably with the introduction of the Plastic Packaging Tax. The tax came into force in April 2022 and is charged at a rate of £200 per tonne. Click [here](#) to see if you need to register.

+ WORK EVENTS & GIFTS

If you are holding events, steer clear of single-use catering supplies. Also, avoid giving out single-use plastic bottles, instead set up a water dispenser with glasses.

Provide clearly labelled and coloured bins to promote correct and responsible disposal.

If you are giving away gifts or goodie-bags, avoid single-use plastics and look for more eco-friendly alternatives. Why not consider giving away digital gifts, like discount codes, downloadable materials, or e-tickets to other events avoid single-use plastics and look for natural materials as alternatives.

Use reusable name badges, lanyards and display stands, instead of using plastic, event-specific products.

+ NEED MORE HELP?

We offer consultancy services if you would like more comprehensive support or information – team@future-plus.co.uk.