



Making a start on the plastic challenge.

Case study 2018/19

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There is a growing concern across business and society about the amount of plastic waste entering the environment and its impact on wildlife and the wider global environment. Our work to reduce plastic-coated coffee cups in our canteens has acted as a launchpad to help other businesses in their efforts to combat pollution.

As part of becoming a more sustainable and responsible business, we have made progress in reducing the amount of single-use plastic waste. Since May 2018, the on-site cafeterias at our offices ditched single-use plastics and switched to Vegware's compostable packaging and cutlery, made from plants, and introduced a specific 20p re-usable cup incentive. Alongside this, we swapped plastic bottled drinks sold from vending machines to aluminium cans, which can be more readily recycled, saving energy, raw materials and avoiding waste.

The initial shift to Vegware, whose products can be composted with food, achieved the short-term goal to eliminate plastic-coated coffee cups. It also gave the company an opportunity to enhance the benefit it can get from the disposal of food packaging.

Over the past year, about 150,000 fewer disposable coffee cups have been used in one office building alone following the introduction of Vegware and a 20p charge for a disposable cup. Therefore, the business has already moved forward from the substitution of single-use plastics to a reduction in overall disposable food packaging use.

Taking further action

There is a growing concern across business and society about the amount of plastic waste entering the environment, and its impact on wildlife and the wider global environment. It can be a daunting task for individuals and companies who are unsure of how to make a start on reducing plastics.

Using what we have learned from reducing single-use plastics in our cafeterias, we have developed a diagram (pictured) to help companies, suppliers and partners think about and make a start on tackling the plastics challenge.

The diagram can be used by companies to help think about the plastics challenge by understanding its scale, making a plan and developing a pledge to help reduce the use of plastic in their activities and to influence their supply chain to do the same. It's down to companies making the pledge to decide what they want to commit to. The most important thing is to make a start on tackling plastics, however big or small the commitment.



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Diagram to help companies make a start on tackling plastics

Supporting the plastic challenge

Plastics are an issue in the water industry, especially when plastic items are wrongly flushed down the toilet, as they can form blockages which cause sewer flooding that can be incredibly damaging to the environment. We have been heavily involved in campaigns which would help reduce the amount of plastics that can enter the water cycle. For instance, we campaigned for the ban of plastic microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products. Below are some more examples of how we're helping to tackle the challenge around plastics.

Plastics working group

We've set up an internal Plastics and Microplastics (PaMP) working group to help understand and manage plastics in the business appropriately. We want to be at the forefront of engagement with regulators and others to protect the environment.

Executive support

Reducing plastics and overall waste is supported from the leadership team and can be demonstrated with our policies, including the sustainability and environment policies, and wider campaigns such as "Bin-it" and Refill.

#SwitchtheStick

We have previously worked with City to Sea on the 2016 #SwitchtheStick campaign to urge retailers to swap plastic cotton bud sticks to paper. More recently, we welcome the announcement by the then Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, on plans to ban the use of plastic stemmed cotton buds as well as drinking straws and drinks stirrers from April 2020. The plastic sticks don't break up when flushed down the toilet so along with fat, wipes and other non-flushables they form fatbergs which can cause sewage flooding to homes, businesses and the environment. Those that arrive at treatment sites are difficult to screen out of the sewage and so can cause further issues. As the ban doesn't come into force until next year, in the meantime it's important that products containing plastic are disposed of in the bin and never down the toilet. Our message is 'Bin it – don't block it': do not flush anything other than the three P's – pee, poo and (toilet) paper – down the drains.

New flushable standard

We actively supported a new 'Fine to Flush' logo that launched in January 2018 to show which wet wipes have passed rigorous scientific testing and can break up in the sewers unlike most currently on the market. Despite many wet wipes being labelled flushable, this is often not the case, so some people unwittingly put them down the toilet which lead to giant fatbergs developing underground that are expensive to clear and can have a devastating impact on the environment. Many wet wipes currently on the market contain plastic to hold them together but those which meet the 'Fine to Flush' standard must be plastic free.



Tap water bar at Chelsea Flower Show

Refill and water fountains

We're helping to create a network of hundreds of public water fountains with the Mayor of London to help reduce single-use plastic waste by encouraging people to refill rather than buy bottled water. We helped run Refill London scheme with City to Sea and the London Mayor which offered people free tap water 'refills' at participating shops and businesses. We have also installed a temporary tap water bar at many events such as Chelsea Flower Show and CountryFile Live where the public can refill their own bottles or buy a subsidised reusable 'Taptastic' aluminium bottle from the stand.

Sustainable Development Goals

We're supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and are positively contributing towards four of them, including Goal 12, Sustainable Consumption and Production. We are working to become more efficient, reduce waste and increase how much we recycle and re-use.



Fine to Flush logo