

## Single Use Plastics - Get them out of the office (or recycle them)

### The Community R4C Guide

*Look around... what do you, your cleaners or facilities use? Have a peek in the bin.  
What do people bring from home?*

Main office contenders are usually:

- Drinks machine / water dispenser disposable cups
- Snack packets / drink containers
- Stationery cupboard - pens, window envelopes, plastic wallets, printers
- Cleaners - Bottles, lids etc
- On-site catering - sandwich boxes, hot drink cups, disposable cutlery

First option is always to consider **replacing with reusables**.

For **hot & cold drink cups**, even the big corporations are switching or rewarding 'bring your own'. In an office this may require additional washing up facilities (or a dishwasher) and the organisation can either provide (branded?) reusable cups & mugs, or ask people to bring from home. The savings will soon rack up. To encourage take-up all staff could be given a cup/mug/reusable bottle funded by projected savings in buying disposables & reduced waste management fees the other end.

If for some reason this isn't right for your organisation, review what you currently use and find a suitable recycling solution. White 'expanded' polystyrene are the worst, replace as soon as possible with 'rigid' PS, PP or paper cups (the latter can have plastic or plant based lining - more later under Catering). If you have a

managed drink dispenser service, talk to the supplier, as some offer a 'take-back' option. Others may be able to switch the type of cup to match your chosen recycling solution. Ideally go all paper or all the same 'type' of plastic to keep things simple (look at the triangular arrows, usually on the base - PP is 5, PS 6) and provide a tube bin at each common disposal point. Commercial cup recycling solutions can be found on the web, or contact us for support\*.

For **pre-packed snacks, drink bottles/cans** (and office paper/delivery boxes) a 'dry recycling' bin may be easiest. Check with your waste supplier or facilities manager, some take everything mixed, others have paper & card separate to plastic/cans/glass. Check if they include Tetrapaks (soup & juice) or coffee cups/lids. If you see a lot of 'not recyclable' items in your waste e.g. biscuit wrappers, there may be a specialist scheme you can participate in e.g. [terracycle.co.uk](http://terracycle.co.uk) (free to join & fundraise for a local charity or use existing collection points in Bisley Greenshop or Ebley Council cafe). Crisp bags are still a problem as no manufacturer wants to sponsor the cost of recycling these multi-layered things.

The **Stationery cupboard** is often overlooked. Here is where 'green purchasing' and behaviour change can make a big difference. Buy good quality & encourage staff to sort, empty and reuse rather than throw everything in the archive box/bin. Do you really need plastic to keep things dry/wipe clean, or would simple paper or cardboard alternatives do?

Plastic wallets, file dividers and the like should be separated from paper when paperwork is archived or finished with - back in the cupboard to use again. Do you send much out in window envelopes/padabags? Many windows are now made of cellulose based material that can be recycled in with paper - check your supplier and switch, and make sure this is printed on the envelope to encourage recipients to recycle in the right way. Consider stick-on labels to reuse envelopes/padabags (open more carefully on receipt and designate a storage area). Consider switching to non-plastic packaging if you run a mail order service. A large sporting goods distributor recently made cost savings and got an unprecedented PR boost by replacing all plastic mail bags and bubble wrap with cardboard and paper alternatives.

Do you get many leaflets, posters or flyers printed? Shiny silky finish may look fancy, but is often not needed. Only laminate or buy 'plastic coated' if absolutely necessary: this stops the paper from being recycled as well as wasting plastic.

Refills used to be the answer for many things, now these tend to be cost prohibitive compared to the disposable options - compromise by buying pens, glue sticks etc made of recycled plastic (e.g. Bic have a new Eco range). Ensure that you aren't providing such cheap ones that they break/dry out long before others would, false economy as well as wasteful. While mixed recycling schemes can't effectively separate this kind of thing, you can collect pens separately - terracycle offer a sponsored recycling service, SDC has a collection bin at Ebley Mill.

Printer/toner cartridges are still mostly disposable but there are many recycling schemes, either free or with charity fundraising options. Get a box and put it by the printer - and consider buying refilled (if these are compatible with your printer) When replacing equipment consider the consumables - cost, refill potential and recyclability.

**Cleaners** get through plenty of consumables. Check that yours use refills, or if storage of the bulk containers is a problem, as a minimum make sure their empties are recycled, in with your dry recycling or if they take them away as part of the service. Don't take their word for it, ask to see evidence of their waste arrangements. If you are a cleaning company, make sure your recycling is compatible with your containers and consider saving your lids for terracycle!

**On-site catering** often use disposables to reduce staff effort when washable could be possible. Sandwich packets, takeaway cartons/trays, plates, cutlery, drink cups, straws, sauce sachets etc. These can mostly be avoided or replaced with reusable/refillable/recyclable.

If pre-packed items are brought in/there is no way the site can entertain storing & washing crockery, fully compostable solutions exist (e.g. Vegware). Much in the press recently about coffee cup recycling - these ARE recyclable just not in with everything else and at a cost. Better to use compostable and put all in with the food waste? Depends on what food waste collection service exists around you. These only compost properly in a process called IVC not AD, and the collection service

needs to provide assurance to the compost site that no plastic items are in there (we have a facility in Gloucestershire that can compost these\*). However, even if alternative-to-plastic items end up in landfills or energy from waste, they haven't used oil to make the plastic liner (its a form of plant starch) and they don't hang around forever in the ground / contribute to incineration emissions.

Finally, remember that **business has a legal obligation** to minimise consumption, reuse & recycle. While this isn't often enforced, all the signs are that government environmental policy is stepping up. It can also count towards CSR objectives to improve brand perception for increasingly concerned customers/investors. If there is enthusiasm from staff to make a change, take full advantage and get ahead of the game - and make it policy so it sticks when other priorities switch the focus. Behaviour change is the hardest bit, a champion in every team/office/subcontractor is worth their weight in... recycling? It tends to end up saving money in the long run.

This help sheet is funded by Community R4C. If you found the contents useful, please share to help Gloucestershire improve it's environmental credentials. Why not increase the impact of your efforts by encouraging your suppliers and customers to review their environmental policies and actions too?

\* Information available on the web. Further assistance is available for your business from CR4C at reasonable rates, contact us on [hello@communityr4c.com](mailto:hello@communityr4c.com)