

Over 150 organisations back call to ban oxo-degradable plastic packaging

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Summary

- Oxo-degradable plastics are being produced and sold in many countries, with society being led to believe they safely biodegrade in nature
- Yet significant evidence suggests oxo-degradable plastics do not safely biodegrade but fragment into small pieces, contributing to microplastics pollution
- Over 150 organisations worldwide endorse a new statement that proposes banning oxo-degradable plastic packaging worldwide
- Signatories include leading businesses, industry associations, NGOs, scientists, and elected officials. They include M&S, PepsiCo, Unilever, Veolia, British Plastics Federation, Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association, Packaging South Africa, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Plymouth Marine Laboratory, and ten Members of the European Parliament

Oxo-degradable plastic packaging, including carrier bags, is often marketed as a solution to plastic pollution, with claims that such plastics degrade into harmless residues within a period ranging from a few months to several years. However, as outlined in a new statement by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's New Plastics Economy initiative, significant evidence indicates that oxo-degradable plastics do not degrade into harmless residues, but instead fragment into tiny pieces of plastic and contribute to microplastic pollution, posing a risk to the ocean and other ecosystems, potentially for decades to come.

"The available evidence overwhelmingly suggests oxo-degradable plastics do not achieve what their producers claim and instead contribute to microplastic pollution. In addition, these materials are not suited for effective long-term reuse, recycling at scale or composting, meaning they cannot be part of a circular economy." - Rob Opsomer, Lead for Systemic Initiatives at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation's [New Plastics Economy initiative](#) has published a statement calling for a ban on oxo-degradable plastic packaging. Signatories include M&S, PepsiCo, Unilever, Veolia, British Plastics Federation, Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association, Packaging South Africa, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Plymouth Marine Laboratory, and ten Members of the European Parliament. In total, over 150 organisations, including leading businesses representing every step of the plastics supply chain, industry associations, NGOs, scientists, and elected officials have endorsed the statement calling for global action to avoid widescale environmental risk.

"Using oxo-degradable additives is not a solution for litter. Their use in waste management systems will likely cause negative outcomes for the environment and communities," said Erin Simon, Director of Sustainability Research and Development, World Wildlife Fund. *"When public policy supports the cascading use of materials – systems where materials get reused over and over, this strengthens economies and drives the development of smarter materials management systems. This leads to wins for both the environment and society."*

As a result of the significant body of evidence raising concerns about the potential negative impacts of plastic fragments from oxo-degradable plastics, an increasing number of companies and governments have started to take action to restrict their use, in particular in Europe. For example, in the UK retailers such as Tesco and the Co-operative stopped the use of oxo-degradable plastics in their carrier bags. France banned the use of oxo-degradable plastics altogether in 2015.

However, oxo-degradable plastics are still produced in many European countries, including the UK, and marketed across the world as safely biodegradable. Several countries in the Middle-East and Africa, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, areas of Pakistan, Yemen, Ivory Coast, South Africa, Ghana and Togo, are still promoting the use of oxo-degradable plastics or have even made their use mandatory.

To create a plastics system that works, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's New Plastics Economy initiative, together with the signing organisations, supports innovation that designs out waste and pollution, and keeps products and materials in high-value use in line with the principles of a circular economy.

Note: Oxo-degradable plastics should not be confused with compostable plastics that comply with international standards and can be safely biodegraded through (industrial) composting.

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THE ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation was created in 2010 to accelerate the transition to a circular economy. The Foundation works across five areas: insight and analysis, business and government, education and training, systemic initiatives, and communication. With its Knowledge Partners (Arup, IDEO, McKinsey & Co., and SYSTEMIQ), and supported by Core Philanthropic Funder (SUN), the Foundation works to quantify the economic opportunity of a more circular model and to develop approaches for capturing its value. The Foundation collaborates with its Global Partners (Danone, Google, H&M, Intesa Sanpaolo, NIKE, Inc., Philips, Renault, Unilever), and its CE100 network (businesses, universities, emerging innovators, governments, cities, and affiliate organisations), to build capacity, explore collaboration opportunities and to develop circular business initiatives. The

Foundation has created global teaching, learning and training platforms on the circular economy, encompassing work with leading universities, schools and colleges, and online events such as the Disruptive Innovation Festival. By establishing platforms such as the New Plastics Economy initiative, the Foundation works to transform key material flows, applying a global, cross-sectoral, cross value chain approach that aims to effect systems change. The Foundation promotes the idea of a circular economy via research reports, case studies and books series, using multiple channels, web and social media platforms, including circulatenews.org which provides a leading online source for circular economy news and insight.

Further information: ellenmacarthurfoundation.org | [@circulareconomy](https://twitter.com/circulareconomy)

THE NEW PLASTICS ECONOMY

The New Plastics Economy is an ambitious, three-year initiative to build momentum towards a plastics system that works. Applying the principles of the circular economy, it brings together key stakeholders to rethink and redesign the future of plastics, starting with packaging. The initiative is led by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in collaboration with a broad group of leading companies, cities, philanthropists, policymakers, academics, students, NGOs, and citizens.

The initiative is supported by Wendy Schmidt as Lead Philanthropic Partner, MAVA Foundation, Oak Foundation, and players of People's Postcode Lottery (GB) as Philanthropic Funders. Amcor, The Coca-Cola Company, Danone, MARS, Novamont, PepsiCo, Unilever, and Veolia are the initiative's Core Partners.

The New Plastics Economy initiative focuses on five interlinked and mutually reinforcing building blocks:

1. Dialogue Mechanism – Bringing together for the first time a group of over 40 leading companies and cities across the global value chain to complete collaborative pioneer projects and inform the other building blocks
2. Global Plastics Protocol – Providing a common target state to innovate towards, to overcome existing fragmentation and enable the creation of effective markets
3. Innovation – Mobilising innovations that can scale globally, to re-define what's possible and create the conditions for a new economy
4. Evidence Base – Building an economic and scientific evidence base to guide improvement and inform the global debate
5. Stakeholder Engagement – Engaging a broad set of stakeholders, including academics, students, policymakers, NGOs, and industry associations in the design of a better plastics system.

Learn more at www.newplasticseconomy.org | [@NewPlasticsEcon](https://twitter.com/NewPlasticsEcon)