

Greater consistency in household recycling in England: the benefits to brands, retailers and manufacturers

Brands, retailers and manufacturers have made good progress in designing packaging that can be recycled and local authorities have made good progress in recycling materials from householders. However, the national recycling rate has stalled. Consumers continue to be confused over whether or not they can recycle packaging and collections of packaging are not consistent across the nation. Analysis by WRAP demonstrates that a whole supply chain approach to tackling this challenge could result in significant benefits.



Potential benefits: calculated over an 8-year transition period 2018/19 to 2025/26

- Reduced reliance on virgin raw materials with up **to 3.2 million tonnes** of additional packaging recycled by 2025;
- **Reduced consumer frustration** with packaging and concerns about its **environmental impact**.
- Consistent **communications to consumers** on what can be recycled, regardless of where they live; and
- By improving both the quantity and quality of what gets recycled it will help producers meet their **recycling obligations** under the packaging regulations.

The Framework for greater consistency

An expert advisory group, brought together by WRAP, has developed a [Framework for greater consistency in household recycling](#) in England. It is underpinned by this vision:

“By 2025, packaging is designed to be recyclable, where practical and environmentally beneficial, and is labelled clearly to indicate whether it can be recycled or not. Every household in England can recycle a common set of dry recyclable materials and food waste, collected in one of three different ways.”



What are the business benefits to brands, retailers and manufacturers?

Building consumer confidence

WRAP's research shows that there is a strong correlation between concerns about packaging materials and how easy it is to recycle them at home. Many consumers therefore believe that making more packaging recyclable would be beneficial.

Supporting consumers to recycle

WRAP's evidence shows that the majority of consumers want to 'do the right thing' by recycling their packaging but 73% of people are confused on what they can or cannot recycle. This confusion, due in part to the variety in types of packaging and also differences in collections, leads to them not recycling all that they can or 'contaminating' recycling by including items they think ought to be collected for recycling. Where practical and environmentally beneficial,

rationalising packaging formats to those which are readily recyclable and labelling packaging with meaningful consumer information to indicate whether it can be recycled or not will help reduce confusion and help consumers to recycle. Also, as local authorities collect a more consistent set of materials, this should help businesses to select materials for packaging.

Reduced reliance on virgin materials

Ensuring packaging is recyclable and labelled to indicate whether it can be recycled or not will reduce the risk of it ending up as a lost resource in landfill. In turn, this will reduce reliance on virgin packaging materials.

Reduced costs

As greater quantities of higher quality packaging are collected for recycling, this will lead to increased availability of recycling evidence thereby helping to contain any potential increase in compliance costs under the packaging regulations due to higher targets.

Achieving greater consistency across England

As outlined in the *Framework*, greater consistency is a long-term goal and can only happen with action across the supply chain, including local authorities. And the change is happening now:

- A number of local authority initiatives are underway to help achieve greater consistency in the collection of materials;
- An industry-led group has been established to help improve the recyclability and sorting of packaging (chaired by the Co-operative Food Group); and
- An industry-led group is exploring opportunities to improve communications with householders to maximise recycling (chaired by Unilever).

WRAP is also working with industry to establish clear guidelines on specific items that can and can't be presented for recycling and how to present them e.g. lids on/lids off and rinsed.

In addition, Defra is undertaking a review of policy and regulations that might affect the delivery of greater consistency.

The *Framework* takes account of current waste composition, service provision and technology as well as regulations and will be kept under review in the light of any future changes and innovations.

Take action

There are three key things that your organisation can do to help achieve more consistency in household recycling:

- Where practical and environmentally beneficial, rationalise packaging formats

(in particular plastic packaging) to those that are recyclable and for which there is a steady market.

- Encourage the implementation of proven measures to improve the sorting of packaging to enable more effective recycling (such as the adoption of fluorescent markers).
- Label all packaging with meaningful consumer information to indicate whether it can be recycled or not.
- Adopt design for recyclability guidance across your packaging procurement process.

Find out more

[A Framework for greater consistency in household recycling collections.](#) An overview of the vision and how it will be delivered.

[Supporting evidence and analysis.](#) The rationale for and benefits of greater consistency.

[Case studies.](#) Find out how businesses are designing packaging for recyclability.

[Brands, retailers and manufacturers support.](#) Guides and tools to help improve design for recyclability.

[Contact us](#) to find out more or get involved.



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