

2.2.3. Colgate-Palmolive

Colgate-Palmolive has a plastic footprint of just over 287,000 metric tonnes from its business: producing household and personal-care products, food products, and health care and industrial supplies.¹ The Break Free From Plastic Audit 2019 identified the company as the eighth-biggest plastic polluter worldwide, and the second-biggest polluter in Africa.²

Colgate-Palmolive's commitments on tackling plastic pollution are relatively sparse. There is no discussion of collection of plastic packaging or calls to support legislation to mandate separate collection. Even the company's strategy for achieving its minimum recycled-content target appears to focus on 'procurement of more recycled content' without corresponding support for mandatory collection.³

There is also very little detail about the company's development of reuse-and-refill systems, apart from mentioning it is participating in TerraCycle's Loop initiative with reusable packaging in the first half of 2020;⁴ at present, however, this appears to be on a small and experimental scale, rather than a reuse-and-refill system for a significant proportion of Colgate-Palmolive products.⁵

The company has a minimum recycled-content target of 25% in all its plastic packaging by 2025. It reports to the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment that its current use of recycled content is 7% of their total plastic packaging. However, the recycled content appears

to vary according to the market, and overly focuses on a few brands: 'In Latin America, we increased recycled content in PET bottles to 50% (from 0% and 25%) in four types of bottles. Validating bottles with recycled content across the world and divisions, to include some brands up to 100%.⁶ Misleadingly, Colgate-Palmolive states a higher figure - 'approximately 45% of our packaging materials by weight globally now come from recycled sources' - on its website, even though the figure is only 7% for plastic.⁷

While Colgate-Palmolive says it has 'long been minimizing the volume and weight of [its] packaging',⁸ there is no mention of an absolute reduction of single-use plastic in units. The company's focus on reduction is set firmly on lightweighting measures in a few brands and particular geographies. For example, it highlights reducing the weight of a Palmolive hand-soap bottle in Italy, the weight of the Suavitel bottle in Mexico and the weight of the cap on Colgate toothpaste in Poland - an unimpressive track record, considering its total tonnage of packaging.⁹ The company is also keen to highlight projects that will 'transform [its] packaging portfolio' - such as introducing 'shrink sleeves with perforated tear tabs' and directing consumers to remove the sleeve at end-of-use to improve bottle recycling¹⁰ - and the introduction of a recyclable high-density polyethylene (HDPE) toothpaste tube. However, the latter retails at six times the price of regular Colgate toothpaste, with roll-out of fully recyclable tubes across all brands only happening by 2025.¹¹ It is not clear whether these recyclable tubes contain recycled content themselves.



Colgate-Palmolive plastic pollution

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References

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