

2.2.6. Nestlé

Nestlé has publicly disclosed its plastic footprint as 1.7 million metric tonnes per year,¹ although Greenpeace Switzerland recently criticised the company for failing to disclose complete, clear and comparable information on plastic reduction.² Nestlé was also the second-worst offender in the Break Free From Plastic Audit 2019.³ Tearfund reports that Nestlé's plastic pollution footprint is 95,000 tonnes a year across just six countries - enough to cover 15 football pitches every day.

In the company's 2019 Creating Shared Value progress report, product packaging and plastic are identified both as holding a significant degree of stakeholder interest and having a major impact on Nestlé's business success.⁴ Nevertheless, although Nestlé supports mandatory EPR,⁵ it does not specifically call for global legislation to mandate over 90% separate collection of plastic bottles, and only mentions a collection target in relation to the company's membership of the European Federation of Bottled Waters (EFBW), which pledged in May 2018 to collect 90% of all PET bottles by 2025.⁶

In 2008, Nestlé Waters NA voluntarily committed to doubling recycling targets for PET bottles to 60% by 2018. By that deadline, the rate was less than half the goal (28.9%), with an average rate of 29.6% over the past 10 years - a large shortfall in ambition, showing almost no progress over the course of the commitment. Nestlé claimed to have set a high target to encourage other industry players to follow suit, but that this call to action was never taken up. Since then, the company's focus has shifted to increasing recycled content, even though high collection and recycling rates are one of the main stimuli for making recycled content competitive.⁷

According to the 2019 New Plastics Economy Global Commitment report, Nestlé has a global target to use 15% of recycled material in its packaging by 2025. The company takes care to highlight specific brands of beverage bottles in which rPET is used in higher percentages across different markets; overall, however, Nestlé reports that recycled content makes up a lowly 2% of its total plastic-packaging volume, and 5% recycled content in PET water bottles.⁸ Nestlé recently committed to reducing virgin plastic by one-third by 2025, and to

invest 2 billion Swiss francs (CHF) to buy food-grade recycled plastics and accelerate innovative sustainable-packaging solutions, such as refill options.⁹

Although Nestlé has, to date, invested 8 million CHF in reuse models - such as for Purina pet foods, and as a member of TerraCycle's Loop¹⁰ - this has only been in high-income countries. The company also reports that, globally, 20% of its water products are sold in refillable and returnable formats, and that it has made dispensers for Nescafé and Milo available in over 20 countries across Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East¹¹ - but this translates into just 1% of its packaging being reusable, and 64% recyclable. Meanwhile, the company continues to sell its products in single-use and non-recyclable sachets, predominantly in emerging markets, where waste facilities are unable to cope.¹² Although it states an ambition to create a 'one tonne in, one tonne out' principle for countries with high leakages of plastic into the environment, thus far, this is a paper promise with no specificity or timeline.¹³

Furthermore, Nestlé appears to be heavily focusing on substituting single-use plastic items with other single-use materials. For example, Nestlé began phasing out plastic straws in February 2019, but appears to be achieving this by switching to other single-use materials, such as paper.¹⁴ The company rolled out paper-based packaging globally for Nesquik in the first quarter of 2019, switched from plastic to paper for its Yes! and Smarties packaging later in 2019, and plans to introduce paper-based pouches for Milo in 2020.¹⁵

In 2019, Nestlé also set up the Institute of Packaging Sciences to 'pioneer environmentally friendly packaging materials',¹⁶ and committed to relatively quick phase-out of problematic non-recyclable materials such as PVC. Nestlé states it is researching marine-biodegradable and compostable polymers, which are also recyclable, for use in water bottles in areas where recycling infrastructure does not yet exist. The company has partnered with Danimer Scientific to develop such a bottle, sold under the brand name Nodax.¹⁷ It is unclear why the company is focusing its efforts on this - rather than on increasing collection and recycling infrastructure - to reach its commitment, as capture rates for bottles of over 90% are frequently achieved in countries with successful DRS.



A flurry of voluntary initiatives

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