



2.2.9. Procter & Gamble

Procter & Gamble (P&G) is a huge, multinational consumer-goods corporation, listed by EMF as the second largest FMCG in the world (by revenue).¹ Its household brands include haircare (Aussie, Pantene, Herbal Essences, Head & Shoulders); grooming (Braun, Gillette, Venus); sanitary products (Always, Tampax); laundry detergents (Ariel, Bold, Daz, Lenor); and baby care (Pampers).² The Break Free From Plastic Audit lists P&G in the top ten global plastic polluters in both 2018 and 2019.³

P&G is not a signatory of the *New Plastics Economy Global Commitment*, and does not publicly disclose its plastic footprint in company's communication materials. The company's sustainability goals for 2030 include reducing its global use of virgin plastic in packaging by 50%. If it manages to do so, it will avoid using 300,000 tonnes of plastic.⁴ According to the company's response to As You Sow, its plastics footprint was 714,000 tonnes in 2018/19; their commitment to 300,000 tonnes of plastic reduction therefore translates to just 42%. As You Sow also reports that P&G made a commitment to 100% recyclable packaging after engaging with them, but P&G's commitment is for 2030 - five years later than many other FMCGs. Edie reports that, currently, '86% of its product packaging is either recyclable or that programmes are in place to create the ability to recycle it'.⁵



Gillette and TerraCycle 'recycling' advertisement

P&G has made no commitments regarding collection, and neither calls for legislation in this area nor mentions support for DRS. It highlights different targets on its US environmental sustainability webpage⁶ than on its UK equivalent.⁷ At the time of writing, there was no reference to the development of reuse-and-refill delivery models for P&G products on their UK site;⁸ on its US site, however, the company highlights its 2019 participation in test programmes with TerraCycle's Loop project in New York and Paris,⁹ in which its brands Pantene, Gillette and Venus were included.¹⁰

When it comes to reduction of virgin-plastic use, P&G states alternative materials will only be used 'when it makes sense', and that lightweighting, increasing recycled content and moving towards more concentrated products will take priority.¹¹ However, this does not appear to involve an absolute reduction in the total number of single-use plastic-packaging units. It is also unclear what instances the company will consider using alternative materials in, and which types of materials. In another document on the company's brand criteria for 2030, it states it will achieve 'a meaningful increase in responsibly-sourced bio-based, or recycled or more resource efficient materials';¹² however, this commitment is nebulous because it does not include an actual target, timeframe or more detail on what 'responsibly-sourced' means.

When it comes to minimum recycled content, P&G talks about 'continuously innovating with recycled plastic',¹³ and, according to As You Sow, has a recycled-content target of 8% for 2025.¹⁴ This is a very modest increase - from 6.3% in 2018. As part of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, P&G has pledged to increase recycled resin usage for PE and PET packaging in Europe by an additional 25 kilotonnes by 2025.¹⁵ Rather than their modest overall rate, however, the company prefers to report its recycled content for individual brands. For example, in February 2020, P&G announced that Ariel liquid detergent bottles in Europe would reach 50% recycled content by the end of the year,¹⁶ while the content of recycled material in Mr. Proper and Viakal surface cleaners would increase from 20% to 70% by 2020.¹⁷ However, the company's reporting on these varied targets - in different geographies and for different brands - is patchy, and it is difficult to ascertain how they are measuring progress, or what is happening with products sold in other markets. Rather than robust reporting, the company seems to be interested in marketing its commitments. For example, P&G created a headline-grabbing pilot project to manufacture a Head & Shoulders bottle, partly produced from ocean plastic that was collected by volunteers in a clean-up in France, in partnership with TerraCycle. They made an attractive video, *Recycling the Unrecyclable*,¹⁸ in which they talked about changing all its bottles in Europe to recycled plastic by 2018 (more than half a billion bottles, containing 25% recycled plastic). The video ended with the CEO of TerraCycle saying: 'this project with Head & Shoulders is the most significant solution to marine plastic that we have ever seen in the world, but it's just the beginning'.

This makes it sound like P&G was planning to replace 25% of all plastic in its European Head & Shoulders bottles with recycled marine plastic, which would have been a significant goal to achieve in just one year. A story published later on the Head & Shoulders website shows that the project in France resulted in 150,000 recyclable shampoo bottles made from plastic pollution, and that the company then took this project to 10 other countries, resulting in around 1 million bottles from 6 tonnes of plastic collected on the beaches.¹⁹



Head & Shoulders bottle made out of recycled beach plastic

Plastic packaging of Procter & Gamble brands

Although P&G says it has increased the percentage of recycled plastic to 25% in Head & Shoulders, Pantene and Aussie shampoo brands in Europe,²⁰ it does not say what happened to its commitment to change all its bottles in Europe to recycled plastic – and it is unclear whether the bottle is fully made of ocean plastic or mixed with virgin material, as implied in the video. The company made a similar headline-grabbing commitment with Fairy washing-up liquid, which was supposed to contain 10% ocean plastic by 2018.²¹ P&G was one of the few FMCGs founding members of the Alliance to End Plastic Waste (see section 2.3.1), which mostly focuses on end-of-pipe solutions; its CEO is now the Chairman of the Alliance.²²

P&G also has a history of changing the goalposts on its voluntary commitments. For example, in 2010, the company made a specific commitment to replace 25% of its petroleum-based materials with sustainably sourced renewable materials by 2020; however, the company did not report progress towards the target. Additionally, in its 2015 sustainability report, the wording of the commitment was changed to a much less stringent one: ‘create technologies by 2020 to substitute top petroleum-derived raw materials with renewable materials as cost and scale permit’.²³ In 2018, P&G claimed it had achieved this goal, but there has been no further mention of the original pledge.²⁴

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