



HONG KONG PLASTICS GUIDE



WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Every year, humans produce over 430 million tonnes of plastic, around two-thirds of which we only use briefly before chucking it in the bin. These single-use items are part of our everyday lives, from food wrappers and bottles to bags, cups and straws. Yet while these items may be throw-away, their impact on the environment is anything but.

Most plastics are made from fossil fuels, using energy derived from fossil fuels. This contributes to global heating. Indeed, today plastic production and disposal accounts for 3.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

But that's not all. Each year, 19-23 million tonnes of plastic waste end up in our oceans, lakes and rivers. This damages our ecosystems, poisoning plants and animals, and makes its way into our food and bodies in the form of microplastic particles.



11,000 TONNES OF WASTE ARE SENT TO LANDFILL IN HONG KONG EVERY DAY. 21% OF THIS IS PLASTIC.

Studies show that, contrary to popular belief, recycling is not a viable long-term solution as plastic is in fact extremely difficult, expensive and energy-intensive to recycle. If we are to tackle the problem, then we must focus on reduction and eliminate single-use plastic for good.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER TO YOU?

Today, we're seeing a flood of laws, agreements and initiatives spring up across the world to tackle plastic pollution. Hong Kong is the latest to join this trend, with a new ban on single-use plastic items that comes into effect on April 22nd, 2024. Phase two of the ban is set for 2025, with roll-out depending on the availability and affordability of the relevant non-plastic or reusable alternatives.

While the new ban on single-use plastics marks a major step towards a more environmentally conscious future for Hong Kong, many hospitality businesses are scrambling to comply with its requirements in time. Plastic plays a huge role in foodservice and, as a result, tackling plastic use can be confusing and daunting. However, by embracing reuse and switching to plastic-free options, businesses often find that they see reduced costs.

THROUGH THIS GUIDE, WE AIM TO GIVE YOU A BETTER IDEA OF WHAT THE NEW BAN MEANS FOR YOU AND HOW TO TAKE ACTION TO REDUCE, REUSE AND RECYCLE SINGLE-USE ITEMS IN YOUR BUSINESS.

THE NEW BAN ON SINGLE USE PLASTICS

WHAT THE BAN COVERS

Restaurants



Polystyrene, Styrofoam and plastic tableware for dine-in customers



Plastic containers
Phase 1: for sit-down meals
Phase 2: for takeaway meals

Hotels & guesthouses



Plastic-bottled water provided in hotel rooms



Toiletries:
Single use items or products disposable plastic containers



Additional plastic items:
Phase 1: Balloon sticks, umbrella bags, glow sticks
Phase 2: Including tablecloths, transparent gloves, plastic covered dental floss and earplugs

Please note that people with disabilities, such as strength and mobility issues, may need a plastic straw to be able to safely eat or drink. The Hong Kong government has confirmed that businesses are allowed to provide plastic straws to customers with special medical needs.

WHAT THE PENALTIES ARE

This law applies to businesses serving single use items. It does not apply to members of the public.

A fixed penalty system will be put in place to regulate the ban. Law enforcement officers will be able to issue \$HK2000 penalty tickets to retailers and foodservice outlets and to those managing them. Businesses found to be in breach of the ban may be subject to a fine of up to HK\$100,000.

WHAT ARE OTHER PLACES DOING?

Many countries across the world have taken steps in recent years to ban single-use plastic items, from the UK and European Union to China and the USA. In the Hong Kong region, similar bans look like this:



Mainland China has recently phased out single-use plastic products. These include non-biodegradable disposable plastic tableware, making and selling expanded polystyrene products (such as takeaway food containers) and plastic cotton buds.



In 2021, Macau banned the import of polystyrene products and disposable utensils, including straws and cutlery.



Taiwan outlawed the use of single-use plastic straws and tableware in 2002 for retail outlets, foodservice, schools and government departments. They are now considering a full ban on single-use plastics by 2030.

WHAT YOU CAN DO



MEASURE

→ Measure your plastic waste output and identify which items you use the most! Do this by segregating your plastic waste and weighing your bins each day over a seven-day period.



MAKE A PLAN

→ Decide what actions you'll take to eliminate the plastic items covered by the ban and outline who is responsible for which action point. Focus first on tackling the items you use the most.

→ To prepare for future extensions to the ban and to save you time and money in the long run, try to reduce and recycle plastic items not yet covered by the ban as well. To do this, set clear, measurable reduction and recycling targets (including how much and by what date). Focus on reduction over recycling and start by tackling your most-wasted items first.



EMPOWER YOUR STAFF

- Share your plan with your staff.
- Train staff on ways to reduce and recycle plastic waste.
- Put up signs about how to reduce and recycle properly.
- Offer incentives for achieving your reduction goals within the agreed timeframe to keep your team motivated and engaged.



REDUCE AND REPLACE

Favour reduction first.

- The best way to reduce plastic waste is to ask yourself if you actually need to use the product in the first place. If not, don't use it!
- Get rid of plastic water bottles by only serving tap or filtered water.
- Encourage diners to bring their own coffee cups, water bottles, containers and cutlery for takeaway meals, offering them a small discount or loyalty points for doing so.

Replace the items you can't do without with reusable alternatives.

- Tableware: replace single-use plates with ceramic/metal ones and use metal straws, cutlery and stirrers.
- In the kitchen: replace plastic wrap, disposable dishcloths and plastic containers with reusable dishcloths and Tupperware.
- Supplier packaging: buy items in bulk and switch to refills wherever possible.
- Work with suppliers to get products delivered in reusable/recyclable packaging.

If you can't source reusable items, use recyclable products or products made with renewable/recycled materials.

For suggestions of plastic alternatives, check out www.greentableware.hk/en-us/Home/PCBList



LET YOUR CUSTOMERS KNOW!

Communicate with your customers about what you're doing to fight plastic waste and why it's important. This will help your brand image and encourage them to support you in your efforts.

WANT TO GO FURTHER?

Sign up to the [Food Made Good Standard](#), the accreditation designed to help you measure the sustainable impact of your restaurant and take practical action.



WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?

The top priority in fighting plastic waste is to focus on reducing the amount of single-use items you use in the first place, and then replacing the ones you can't avoid with reusable alternatives.

However, we understand that it may not be possible to completely eliminate single-use products from your operations. Where this is the case, it's important to understand the materials you're choosing, and where they'll end up once you've thrown them away.

THE BEST CHOICE IS:

BUT IF YOU CAN'T DO THAT, THEN:



Reusable cutlery & stirrers, e.g., metal.
Encourage customers to bring their own.

Wooden, biodegradable or compostable cutlery & stirrers.



Reusable plates & bowls, e.g., metal or ceramic.
Encourage customers to bring their own.

Paper plates (ideally recycled or FSC).



Water filtered (and carbonated, for fizzy) on-site.
Reusable bottles/drinks containers, e.g., glass.
Bulk-order drinks, e.g., in kegs.

Aluminium cans or recycled plastic bottles.



Reusable straws, e.g., metal or glass.

Paper straws (ideally recycled or FSC).
Edible straws, e.g., pasta.
Biodegradable or compostable straws.



Reusable cups, e.g., metal, ceramic or bio-plastic.
Encourage customers to bring their own.

Paper cups & lids.
Biodegradable or compostable cups & lids.



Reusable containers, e.g., metal, glass or bio-plastic.
Encourage customers to bring their own.

Paper/card containers.

WHAT GOES WHERE?



Disposing of single-use items correctly is an important way of minimising their impact on the environment. It can be confusing, however, to know what goes where; choose the wrong bin and you risk contaminating the whole lot and sending it to landfill!

WHAT IS IT?

Conventional plastics (PET & RPET)

These are plastics made from fossil raw material (oil). PET is made from oil, and RPET is made from recycled PET. These are the focus of the Hong Kong ban.

Bio-based plastics (including PLA)

These are plastics made in part or fully from biological raw materials, such as corn starch or sugarcane (as is the case with PLA), vegetable fats or oils. Not all bioplastics are biodegradable, nor biodegrade more readily than fossil-based plastics. For this reason, we do not recommend these as an alternative to conventional plastics.

Biodegradable plastics

Plastics produced from either bio-based or fossil-based raw material that are designed to be broken down by bacteria or other microorganisms and disappear back into the environment.

Compostable plastics

Plastics capable of degrading into a compost under specific conditions. Some materials can only be composted in an industrial composting plant, while others are designed to be compostable at home, using lower temperatures than an industrial composter.

Wood, bamboo & bagasse (sugarcane pulp)

Paper and card

Disposal choices for paper, particularly packaging, depends on if it is “heavily contaminated” – that is, has a lot of leftover food on it – or not.

Glass

WHAT BIN DOES IT GO IN?



Industrial or home composting, depending on the material and local composting rules. For example, PLAs will have to be industrially composted, and some facilities do not accept resin-treated wood. Check the product specifications and your local recycling rules for more information about which option to choose.

