

PLASTIC AWARENESS AND REDUCTION TOOLKIT



FOOD SERVICE



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Introduction

This toolkit was created by Mind Your Plastic for foodservice businesses and organizations across Canada with the aim of guiding action on plastic waste reduction and eliminating single-use plastics. It is intended to act as a guide for establishing and improving plastic waste reduction strategies. In this guide, we are primarily focused on plastic products and packaging, knowing that the plastic pollution problem reaches far beyond single-use plastics and packaging. This toolkit is not necessarily an exhaustive list of options available to businesses and organizations on their plastic waste reduction journey. However, there are many different alternatives and strategies presented in this toolkit to give a variety of tools and initiatives to explore.

Each business and organization will have a unique approach to plastic waste reduction based on its needs and capacities. As a result this toolkit is not a one-size-fits-all model and no one solution is prescribed for businesses to achieve plastic-free operations or services. Plastic waste is a pervasive issue that requires change on every level of the products and packaging supply chain. This toolkit is a great resource to find a starting point and understand the potential for plastic waste reduction in your business or organization.

Table of Contents

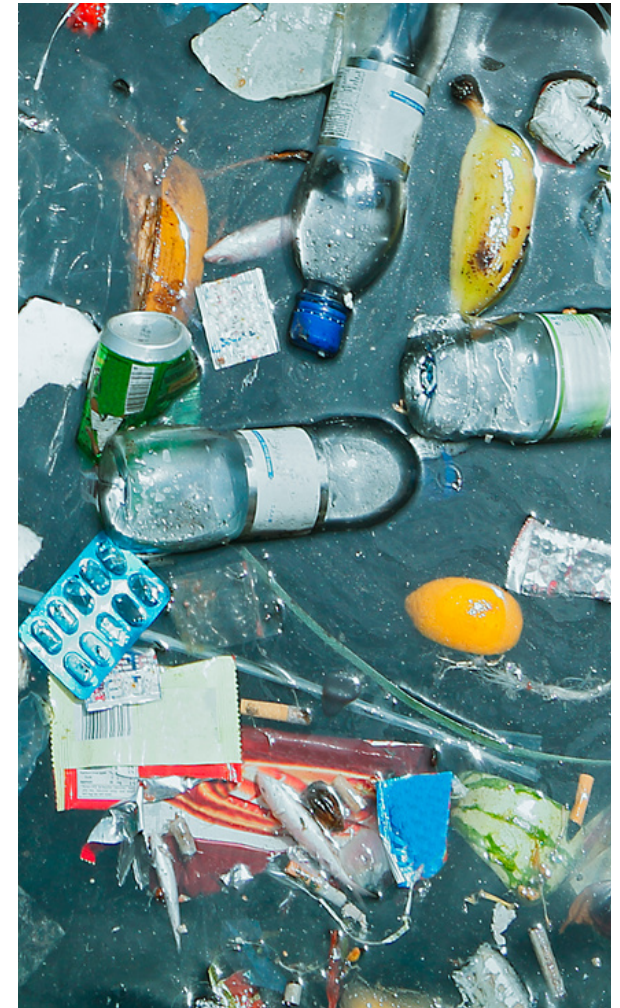
The Plastic Problem	page 4
Leadership and Policy	page 5
Plastic Reduction Target Setting	page 6
Best Practices	page 7
Good Practices and What to Avoid	page 10
Business Case for Reusables	page 11
Communications and Training	page 13
Conclusion	page 14

The Plastic Problem

Plastics are present in every area of our lives. It is an extensive problem that has significance beyond just single-use plastics. Understanding that the plastic waste problem extends to many other industries and many other types of plastics, the scope of this toolkit is to address single-use plastics in the food service industry. The food service industry is a large culprit of using disposable plastic packaging for the convenience and ease of customers. Whether it is takeaway cups, single-use food ware, or plastic shrink wrap on food, there is an abundance of plastic waste across food service operations.

In Canada, only 9% of plastics are recycled. Of the remaining plastic waste, 86% is dumped in landfills, 4% is incinerated, and 1% is released into the environment as litter. More than 3.3 million tonnes of plastic waste is produced every year in Canada, with approximately half of that waste coming from plastic packaging. The majority of the plastic packaging manufactured in Canada is designed and made of materials that are meant to be used only once. The growing market for single-use plastics has enabled a linear economy that prioritizes virgin plastics designed specifically for short term use. Unfortunately, the data shows that these plastics, even those perceived to be highly recyclable, are not recycled to the extent you would hope or expect at their end-of-life.

Additionally, businesses and organizations should understand that single-use plastic is only one area of plastic pollution, and the work does not stop there. Although not addressed in this toolkit, we want to assert the importance of examining how your industry interacts with or utilizes plastics in products such as textiles, which produce harmful microplastics, like microfibres, or e-waste.



Leadership and Policy

It is important for businesses and organizations to design a strategy to minimize or eliminate their reliance on single-use plastics and plastic packaging. It is even more important for businesses and organizations to adopt a plan that looks beyond recycling as a solution to the plastic pollution problem. A plastic waste reduction plan is a commitment to rethinking and reducing plastics at the source, keeping plastics out of the waste stream. For the most part, the choice by food service businesses to make the move away from single-use materials is voluntary. The federal government has started gradually implementing regulations to guide businesses away from single-use materials, but these changes are happening slowly and are not all-encompassing. There are important steps being taken to reduce disposable plastics (e.g. ban on five common single-use plastics, recycled content requirements, and recycling and composting labeling), but other policy solutions (e.g. circular design standards and reusable systems) have not yet been prioritized. As a result, businesses that want to adopt fully circular or reusable operations need to be proactive and show leadership in the initiatives and design changes.

Leadership in plastic waste reduction requires commitment, initiative, and often a high level of collaboration— with other businesses and organizations, customers and consumers, as well as manufacturers and suppliers. Taking action now means blazing paths and finding solutions through hands-on experience. Depending on the size and scope of the business or organization, leadership can look different and take various forms.



Plastic Reduction Target Setting

An effective plan also sets targets and timelines for plastic waste reduction. Targets give your business or organization a tangible goal to achieve and celebrate. Additionally, targets provide an opportunity to measure progress and track the success of your plastic waste initiatives. It should clearly define your target, the actions required to achieve your target, any resources you may need, and a timeline for reaching your target. The targets set in a plastic waste reduction plan should be “SMART” goals, which means they should be:

Specific
Measured
Actionable
Realistic
Time-related

After drafting the plan, the timeline creates your guide on when to review your goals and check the progress made. Biannual waste audits are recommended to track your progress and verify that your plastic plan is impacting on the amount and type of waste produced. Mind Your Plastic has a plastic waste audit guide and a self-guided audit available for businesses to track their waste reduction progress.

Example plastic waste reduction plan:

Plastic waste concern	Action(s)	Target(s)	Potential barriers or resources needed	Timeline
Customer education and engagement	Educate and encourage customers to go plastic-free when dining out	Have at least 100 customers sign a pledge to go plastic waste-free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a list of resources for customers to explore to learn more about plastic waste - Uptake from customers to learn and commit to going plastic free when dining out - Build a beginner kit for customers with reusable containers, straws, etc. 	-Short term: December 2022
Single-use plastic cups	Eliminate single-use plastic beverage cups and cups with hard to recycle plastic films from the business	Reduce plastic waste from plastic beverage cups by 100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acceptance of the employees in the workplace and/or customers - Selecting appropriate alternatives for disposable plastic beverage cups - Finding new suppliers for the alternatives 	-Medium term: March 2023
Single-use plastic	Eliminate single-use plastic across the business	Reduce single-use plastic by 100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding effective alternatives for each single-use plastic item across the business' operation - Educating staff and customers on the alternatives and why single-use plastics should be eliminated - Running refill and reuse program pilots to see what works best for you 	-Long term: January 2026

Best Practices

The best practice to eliminate plastic waste in food service is to rethink and reduce your plastic footprint.

Rethink

- Consult with your suppliers, and become an advocate by participating in conversations about changing their plastic packaging or asking them how they plan to address plastic waste.
- Hold your suppliers accountable for their plastic waste promises by using your purchasing power and seeking out other options in situations where suppliers are not willing to make the necessary changes. This can include shifting to suppliers that already align with your plastic waste plan and supporting effective plastic management practices.
- Limit business with suppliers that continue to use single-use or lower grade plastics.
- Participate in discussions with the municipal government and waste management leaders about how to improve collection for industrial, commercial, and institutional locations.
- Change attitudes around plastic packaging, and join like-minded businesses to establish coalitions or groups that will share knowledge and best practices.
- Research and explore the federal, provincial, and municipal resources or programs that exist to help businesses in their transition by subsidizing any associated increase in costs.
- Seek out B2B services such as [ReThink BioClean](#), which provides bulk zero waste cleaning and janitorial products from their mobile refillery and contribute to your package-free goals.



Best Practices

Plastic waste can be reduced and reused in the food service sector in the following ways:

- Discontinue single-use plastics like hot and cold beverage cups, plastic beverage bottles, plastic wraps and films, plastic-coated packaging and plastic food bags (e.g. product bags, meat wrapping bags, single-use zippered plastic bags).
- Discontinue single-use condiments packets, which can easily be replaced with reusable bottles and dispensers that can be refilled (e.g. for ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, butter, jam, vinegar, salt, and pepper).
- Become a publicized community water refill station to reduce the need for plastic water bottles and beverage cups. Register through organizations like [BlueW](#) to become more visible to the public and let your community know they are able to refill their reusable water bottles at your location.
- Partner with initiatives that promote plastic-free businesses, like [Plastic Free Restaurants](#), is another effective tool to get the word out about your initiatives and allow consumers to take advantage of plastic-free food service.
- Create a plastic waste reduction team in your workspace to promote reduced plastic behaviours, set targets, ask for new suggestions and ideas, as well as organize educational activities. For example, host a lunch and learn about plastic waste, screen a documentary, invite a guest speaker, hold a question and answer session, and ask people how they will take what they learned from the activity to reduce their own plastic waste.

- Create a policy mandating reusables for on-site dining (washable plates, cutlery, glasses, etc.).
- Provide reusable alternatives for takeout. Rethink Disposables has even created a [Reusable Food Serviceware Guide](#) to provide an overview of the multitude of reusable serviceware available to restaurants and food service businesses.
- Enroll in plastic-free takeout services and working with companies like Case in Toronto. A reusable delivery service option allows customers to have their food delivered in reusable takeout containers in locations where the restaurant has not yet set up a full system for reusable food packaging.
- Install [reuse deposit systems](#) that create brand loyalty and an opportunity for return business, increase customer satisfaction, and often require no more dishwashing or associated labor costs than dine-in eating.
- Promote reusables for purchase and branding them with your business or organization's logo.
- Encourage customers to bring their own reusable containers for take-out dishes while following all health and safety protocols.

Reduce

Reuse

Good Practices & Practices to Avoid

Below is a list of good practices related to recycling:

Recycle

- Ensure your waste management system goes beyond garbage to include recycling and composting options.
- Select options that are guaranteed recyclable or compostable in your region.
- Label each waste receptacle clearly for staff and customer use.
- Ensure all products and packaging clearly indicate whether the material can be recycled or composted.
- Make recycling and composting receptacles available for back-of-house and front-of-house operations with educational signage on each receptacle as an extra step to make sure all materials are disposed of correctly.
- Ensure your plastic waste reduction plan aligns with what the waste collection service does with materials they collect in each municipality.



Below is a list of practices to avoid wherever possible:

- Avoid disposable materials that are not recyclable and cannot be reused.
- Single-use plastics are some of the most problematic materials used in food service, ending up landfills and our environment as pollution.

Landfill

Business Case for Reusables

Reusables are not only better for the environment, but are also better for your business' bottom line. What we hear most often about reusable products is that the initial investment can be intimidating. However, when we examine the initial investment and the lifetime of use from a reusable, there are significant cost savings for food service businesses.

Upstream estimates that more than 24 billion dollars are spent on disposable foodware items in the United States each year. Every single-use foodware item has an associated cost that is spent on every new item purchased. In case studies of hundreds of foodservice businesses with on-site dining, they have found that 100% of the time, a switch to reusables resulted in cost savings for the business. The myth that disposables are cheaper than reusables is just that— a myth. Even minor changes to incorporate reusables for on-site dining result in meaningful savings.



Business Case for Reusables

Case Study: J&J Hawaiian BBQ– California, USA

J&J Hawaiian BBQ is a family-owned business in California with only two employees that has adopted reusables in a fast casual dining setting. The owners ditched disposables in favour of reusable plates, bowls, food baskets, cutlery and chopsticks, cups, and ramekins for sauces. They have eliminated **311,313 disposable items, 9,172 lbs of disposable waste every year, and have an ongoing net cost savings of \$20,516 annually.** In addition to saving money by not purchasing disposables, the restaurant has not had to hire on an additional employee for dishwashing. The cost of dishwashing is a popular concern related to reusables, and the case studies demonstrate that additional investment in labour and dishwashing capacity is often not required to adopt a reusable system.



ReThink Disposable– Reusable Savings: J&J Hawaiian BBQ

Reusable type	Product Replaced	% Disposable Reduction	Payback Period (months)	Annual Savings	Annual Waste Reduction (lbs.)
Plate	Large to-go Food Box	60.0%	0.1	\$9,307.50	4,517
Basket & bowl	Small to-go Food Box	56.0%	0.2	\$7,665.00	3,705
Basket & bowl	Food Boat	100.0%	3.7	\$40.80	32
Stainless steel fork	Plastic fork	50.0%	1.9	\$260.71	308
Stainless steel spoon	Plastic spoon	25.0%	6.6	\$86.90	82
Stainless steel knife	Plastic knife	50.0%	1.9	\$260.71	295
Chopsticks	Chopsticks	27.0%	0.7	\$613.97	74
Ramekin	2 oz. Sauce Cup	15.0%	0.7	\$215.23	12
Ramekin	2 oz. Sauce Lid	15.0%	3.4	\$42.99	5
Ramekin	4 oz. Sauce Cup	100.0%	0.3	\$478.57	215
Ramekin	4 oz. Sauce Cup	100.0%	0.4	\$334.96	144
Tumbler	16 oz. Cold Cup	50.0%	1.0	\$319.41	133
Tumbler	16 oz. Cold Cup Lid	50.0%	1.6	\$194.75	59
Tumbler	8 oz. Water Cup	100.0%	0.8	\$520.91	29
Napkin dispenser	Napkins	30.0%	1.7	\$174.27	114
Total				\$20, 516.69	9,722 lbs

Phasing-in waste reduction

Communicate with consumers and members about any new pilot initiatives or phase-in periods that are being implemented. A phase-in period may allow you to use the remainder of the plastic products you have in-house and notify customers in advance of the changes that are happening. Announce to your consumers that it is a pilot or phase-in period, so they can understand and have the opportunity to prepare and fully participate in the waste reduction initiatives. It also gives them agency to choose whether they want to start bringing in their own reusable containers, pay a deposit on containers or packaging, or participate in your initiatives in other ways. It is important for changes to be well thought out, so that no large alterations are necessary following implementation. Frequent changes to the standards or expectations of service can contribute to information fatigue or reduce a consumer's willingness to participate.

Employee training and customer awareness

Training ensures that staff understand the targets and best practices, and that everyone has the knowledge and tools to work towards achieving your waste reduction goals. They are the first line of defense for waste management, often sorting waste materials and becoming the face of your plastic reduction initiatives. Staff meetings can also be used to check in with staff to receive feedback on progress and suggestions for improvement.

Customer education can be made possible through informed staff and accessible resources. Educational resources can be made available for customers online and in-house, so that they can read about your initiatives. In-house signage or newsletters can be great opportunities to communicate the benefits of going plastic free to your consumer base. Keep the conversation open and ongoing with consumers to foster plastic-free attitudes and to build a reuse culture in your business or organization. Informing customers or members that they have a crucial role in making the shift away from plastic and asking them for feedback will empower them to participate fully in the initiative and take ownership of their plastic habits.

Conclusion

Our toolkit offers an introduction to plastic waste reduction for businesses and organizations. While presenting a selection of best practices, we recognize that this toolkit only scratches the surface of the options and alternatives available for businesses and organizations to explore. Your journey to reducing single-use plastics may be vastly different from others in your industry. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to plastic waste reduction in any sector. With the flexibility and variety of strategies available to businesses and organizations, there should be no hesitation in taking the first step to waste reduction. It is important to assign yourself a leadership role in your sector, take responsibility, and make a plan for the plastic that is used and wasted in your daily operations. The plastic pollution problem is constantly developing, and it is not enough to wait for government actors to mandate waste reduction initiatives. Voluntary action and leadership is essential to preventing further plastic waste and protecting our natural environments.

Additional resources:

- Conference for Food Protection's [Health and Safety Guidance for the Use of Reusable Containers](#)
- York Region's [Single-Use Resources for Businesses](#)
- City of Toronto's [Reducing Single-Use Program](#)
- Canadian reuse service providers:
 - [Friendlier](#)
 - [Muuse](#)
 - [Sharewares](#)
 - [Reusables.com](#)
 - [La Vague](#)



Thank you!

Contact us at advocacy@mindyourplastic.ca