

# PLASTIC AWARENESS AND REDUCTION TOOLKIT

**OFFICE AND  
ADMINISTRATION**



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## Office and administration



### Introduction

This toolkit was created by Mind Your Plastic for businesses and organizations with office and administration 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 office and administration operations. From office supplies to employee packaging habits, there are many areas where single-use items can be eliminated.

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 to make the move away from single-use materials is voluntary in the office and administration space. 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, 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:

**S**pecific  
**M**easured  
**A**ctionable  
**R**ealistic  
**T**ime-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
Employee education	Run a lunch and learn for employees about the consequences of plastic pollution	Have at least 30 employees sign a pledge to go plastic waste-free for lunches	- Plan a lesson or educational session for employees (e.g. learning materials, documentaries) - Uptake from employees to attend the lunch and learn	Short term: December 2022
Single-use plastic pens	Eliminate plastic disposable ballpoint pens	Reduce number of plastic ballpoint pens by 100%	- Finding effective non-plastic options - Using up the stock that you currently have and finding recycling programs to properly dispose of the plastic pens - Set up a centralized supply library and assign an employee to distribute supplies to reduce the amount of unnecessary use of stationery	-Medium term: March 2023
Single-use plastic	Eliminate single-use plastic across the business	Reduce single-use plastic by 100%	- 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 your business	-Long term: January 2026

## Best Practices

The best practice to eliminate plastic waste in the office is to rethink your plastic footprint.

## Rethink

- Find solutions in your supply chain to eliminate plastic packaging and seek out supply partnerships that work with your plastic waste reduction plan.
- Ask suppliers to implement plastic design rules and reduce plastic at the source.
- Foster a sense of commitment to plastic waste reduction among staff leadership and management.
- Survey the attitudes of employees concerning plastic waste. You may need to raise awareness about the plastic pollution problem to fully engage the workplace or customize your approach to plastic waste reduction depending on the level of engagement from those in the workspace.
- Perform a waste audit to understand the areas where reduction is most needed, Brainstorm with staff about what areas are most important to them to address first.
- 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 an office in the following ways:

## In the workplace

- Create a plastic waste reduction team or green team of employees who help hold the rest of the team accountable, lead initiatives 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.
- For workspaces with on-site dining, do not supply single-use plastic packaging for food items in lunchrooms and cafeterias.
- Workplaces can also establish a supply of reusable glasses, cutlery, plates etc. and allow employees to donate their gently used dinnerware for employees to use at work.
- Encourage staff to bring their own reusable containers and have waste-free lunches.
- Hold a contest or competition to reward those who bring the most waste-free lunches over a month and have the prize be related to plastic waste reduction.

## In the office supply strategy

- Work with the office's procurement team to find alternatives to single-use plastic office supplies. There are many options for stationery and office supplies that are plastic-free or low-waste. For example, refillable fountain pens, pens made of paper or recycled content, and plastic-free notebooks or binders. Another simple step is to reduce the overall amount of plastic office supplies ordered and utilized by the office.
- Ask each staff member to limit themselves to one or two disposable pens, highlighters, markers, etc. at a time, so that the entirety of its contents are used before it is returned for recycling and a new writing instrument is retrieved.
- Establish a centralized, locked stationery supply in-office, and assign one person to direct the flow of office supplies for the entire office to reduce the amount of unnecessary consumption of office supplies.

# Reduce



## Best Practices

Below is a list of actions office spaces can take to promote reusable alternatives:

## Reuse

- Utilize a centralized office supply library for items that are typically made of plastics such as scissors, staplers, etc. that can be shared and reused throughout the office. The use of a long-term communal supply inventory will reduce the number of non-essential plastic office supplies in your workspace and minimize office supply spending.
- Provide your office team with a reusable toolkit. This could include a guide on how each person can reduce their plastic waste, their own personal recycling bin, as well as reusable items for the office such as a reusable water bottle, reusable coffee mug, reusable straw and even reusable silicone snack bags to show the availability of reusable options.
- Provide reusable cutlery, drinkware, and dinnerware in the lunchroom or cafeteria. Staff will not feel the need to purchase or bring plastic cutlery or plastic water bottles, when they know there is drinkware and dinnerware available to be used daily in their workplace.
- Make reusability a significant tenet of your procurement policy for office furniture.
- Utilize refurbished furniture and office decor in your workspace when new accommodations are needed.
- Seek out recycled content products like post-consumer carpeting or desks to ensure the products in your office space are not made of virgin plastics.



Good Practices & Practices to Avoid

Below is a list of good practices related to recycling:

Recycle

- Lead by example by giving staff clear instructions on which materials are recyclable and compostable.
- Make recycling and composting receptacles clearly marked and well-placed so that staff can access them easily regardless of their office location.
- Find a recycling system for difficult to recycle items like writing instruments and batteries. For instance, TerraCycle and Staples have partnered to create a recycling program for pens, markers, and other stationery to allow customers to return their used writing utensils to Staples for recycling. TerraCycle sorts the different types of plastics, shreds them, and sells the raw material product to manufacturing companies that produce items such as “outdoor furniture and decking, plastic shipping pallets, watering cans, storage containers and bins, tubes for construction applications, flooring tiles, playground surface covers and athletic fields, and much more.”



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 both in office supplies and employee packaging habits, ending up in landfills and our environment as pollution.

Landfill

## Business Case for Reusables

There is a great business case for office spaces considering a transition to reduction or reuse and away from single-use items. There are many strategies to reduce plastic waste— whether through procurement or reusables or overall reduction of plastics. KPMG, a global accounting firm, banned single-use plastic cups from their UK office in 2018. The Manchester office has 1100 employees, and it previously [cost them 60,000 British pounds per year \(approximately \\$100,000 CAD\) to purchase single-use cups](#). The company offered a free reusable water bottles to its employees to transition away from plastic bottles and over 900 employees took advantage of the offer. For those that did not take advantage of the free reusable bottle, or forget their own reusable bottle, are charged 50 cents per single-use paper cup on the premises. They report that fewer than 10 employees in the office have availed of the 50 cent paper cup replacement. They have also expanded their plastic reduction initiatives to include company-wide employee pledges. Through the pledges, they estimate their employees have [prevented 39,441 plastic bags, 22,333 plastic straws, 17,844 plastic water bottles, 5,023 single-use coffee cups, and 32,513 items of plastic cutlery](#).

Ricoh, a workplace solutions company, has also recently teamed up with an American telecommunications provider to reduce their printing and plastic cartridge waste across their offices. In addition to the paper-saving measures that were programmed into newly installed printer systems (including switching all machines to default to black and white ink), Ricoh also established a plastic toner cartridge recycling program in 60 buildings across the company. Ricoh provides free shipping containers to each of the mailrooms in these buildings to collect each used toner cartridge, which are then placed into a box and shipped free of charge to a third party company where the cartridge is recycled. The company [recycled 22,216 toner cartridges over four years, which the company estimates has avoided 75,534 pounds of landfilled plastic and metal](#). Between both programs, the company has saved more than \$600,000 in printing and disposal costs.





## Phasing-in waste reduction

Communicate with suppliers and employees about 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 everyone in advance of the changes that are happening. Provide ample time and resources for employees to participate in the waste reduction initiatives. Give them ownership and input over the reduction model you chose whether-- bringing in their own reusable containers, paying a deposit on containers or packaging, or participating 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 an employee's willingness to engage actively in plastic reduction.

## Employee training

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. Educational resources can be made available in common rooms such as lunch and printer rooms, where employees can read about your initiatives. In-house email newsletter and reminders can be great opportunities to communicate the benefits of going plastic free to your staff. 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 staff 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:

- [Lunch room reminder signs to go plastic-free at work](#)
- [Mobile commercial refillable cleaning supplies with Rethink BioClean](#)
- [TerraCycle Zero Waste Box for office supplies](#)
- [How to start a Green Team at work](#)
- [Plastic-Free July tips to reduce plastics at work](#)



# Thank you!

Contact us at [advocacy@mindyourplastic.ca](mailto:advocacy@mindyourplastic.ca)