

# PLASTIC AWARENESS AND REDUCTION TOOLKIT

**RETAIL**



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## Retail



### Introduction

This toolkit was created by Mind Your Plastic for retail businesses across Canada with the aim of guiding action on plastic waste reduction and eliminating single-use plastics. In this guide, we are primarily focused on plastic products and packaging, with the acknowledgement 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 on their plastic waste reduction journey. However, there are many alternatives and strategies presented in this toolkit to give a variety of tools and initiatives that businesses can 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 perfect solution is prescribed for businesses to achieve plastic-free operations. 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 retail business.

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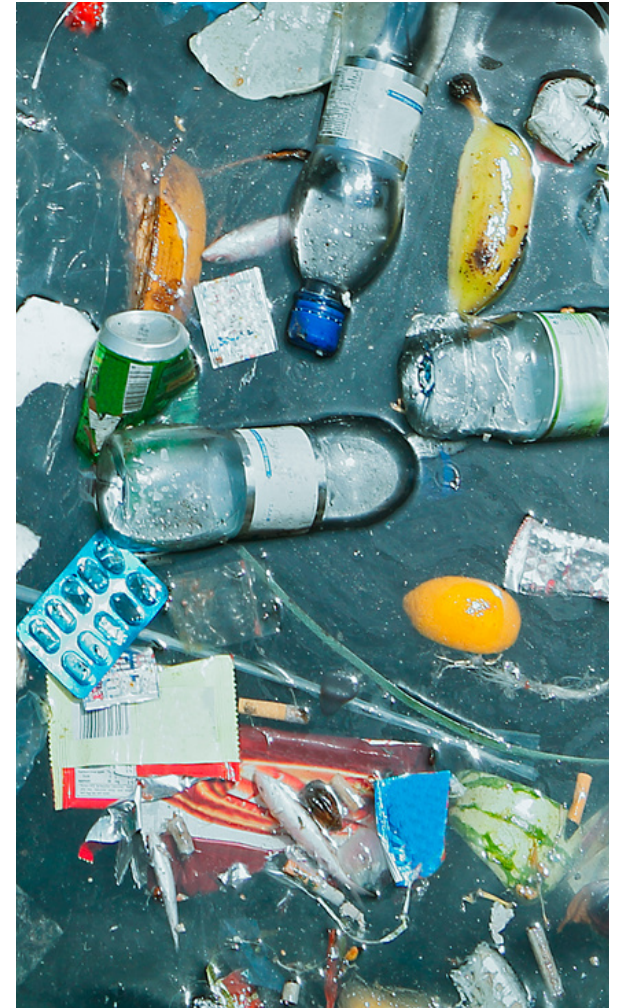
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## The Plastic Problem

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 retail service industry. The retail industry is a large culprit of using disposable plastic packaging for the convenience and ease of customers. Whether it is disposable food packaging or business-to-business plastic packaging for clothing, there is an abundance of plastic waste across retail 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 retail 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:

**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)<br>- Uptake from employees to attend the lunch and learn   | Short term:<br>December 2022 |
| Single-use plastic fruit and vegetable wraps | Eliminate single-use fruit and vegetable wraps with hard to recycle plastic films from the business | Reduce plastic waste from fruit and vegetable wraps by 100%                   | - Acceptance of the employees in the workplace and/or customers<br>- Selecting appropriate alternatives for fruit and vegetable wraps (or removing altogether)<br>- Finding suppliers for the alternatives   | Medium term:<br>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<br>- Educating staff and customers on the alternatives and why single-use plastics should be eliminated<br>- Running refill and reuse program pilots to see what works best for your business | Long term:<br>January 2026   |

## Best Practices

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

## Rethink

Below are options to rethink your plastic waste in the retail sector:

- Make deliberate and well-researched selections about who supplies your products and the materials used to deliver your stock.
- Seek out other options in situations where suppliers are not willing to make the necessary changes and move to suppliers that are ready to collaborate with you on your plastic waste plan.
- Stock products that abide by the [Golden Design Rules](#), and if plastics are necessary, find durable, long lasting plastics instead of single-use plastics.
- Change retail packaging norms to shift the mindset about unnecessary in-store packaging and take on the responsibility of educating consumers.
- Make it a store philosophy to be an active participant in reducing plastic waste.
- 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 in the retail sector in the following ways:

## In the store

- Set a goal for all store brand packaging to be 100 percent recyclable, compostable or reusable in a specific timeline.
- Discontinue single-use plastics in packaging, stickers, wrappings, and clothing labels, as well as any other small disposable plastics.
- Discontinue plastics that are used to package non-perishable products coming directly from the manufacturer. For example in clothing retail, clothing items that are unnecessarily packaged individually in plastic for delivery to retail stores or plastic tags on the merchandise.
- Offer disposable shopping bags and packaging (e.g. paper bags) only upon request and implement a fee per item that will provide a significant deterrent for consumers in an effort to encourage the use of reusable bags.

## In the supply chain

- Work with suppliers to create delivery and transportation solutions that reduce existing plastic waste in the supply chain.
- Use alternative materials in packing, and reusable delivery packaging. Businesses have already started to adopt packing materials such as corrugated cardboard, biodegradable cornstarch packing peanuts, and reusable packaging fill such as fabric bags for transportation.
- Verify with waste collectors to ensure that the packaging materials selected are accepted by the local green bin or organics collection.
- Replace non-recyclable plastic tape with a recyclable alternative such as kraft paper tape for both deliveries and packages shipped to customers from the retail location.

# Reduce



## Reduce

## 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 or purchase single-use plastic packaging for food items in lunchrooms and cafeterias.
- 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.

## Promotional opportunities

- Run promotions for products that are low-waste, no-waste, or have recycled content, allowing customers to save on these specific items as an incentive to buy plastic-free.
- Make flyers and advertisements digital only, reducing paper consumption as well as eliminating the single-use plastic bag in which paper flyers are often delivered.
- Retail locations can become community water refill stations to reduce the need for plastic water bottles by installing water fountains for public use. Register through organizations like BlueW to become more visible to the public as a refill station.

## Best Practices

Below are a few best practices to introduce reuse infrastructure into your business or organization:



- Create closed loop processes that eliminate plastic waste at the source. With closed loop and reusable infrastructure, we know all the packaging is created for long-term reusability.
- Offer a range of reusable packaging alternatives for customers to buy in-store (e.g. glass jars, canvas bags, reusable produce bags, reusable garment bags).
- For locations with in-store furniture, seek out refurbished furniture or upcycled furniture for zero waste and unique decor.
- In clothing and textile retail spaces, shift to non-plastic hangers to display and store your items. Plastic hangers are not durable and often cannot be recycled due to the mixed plastics used in each hanger.
- Create reusable in-store promotion signage. A great idea is to use a surface like a chalkboard or a whiteboard that are customizable as signage, and can be easily wiped clean to redesign as promotions change.

Reuse

Good Practices & Practices to Avoid

Below is a list of good practices related to recycling:

# Recycle

- As an industrial, commercial, and institutional actor, retail businesses must participate fully in community waste management.
- Ensure your waste management system includes recycling and composting options.
- Clearly label products in your store to indicate whether the material can be recycled or composted.
- Ensure that recycling and composting receptacles are easily accessible to the general public and to staff.
- If you are a business that continues to offer products in plastic wrapping or plastic produce and meat bags, a program in-store to collect these materials back from consumers for recycling should be established immediately.



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 retail packaging (both B2B and B2C applications), and end up in landfills and our environment as pollution.

# Landfill

## Business Case for Reusables

There are many different approaches that retail businesses can take to incorporate reusables into their operations, both on the business-to-consumer (B2C) and the business-to-business level (B2B). For instance, in B2C packaging, retail businesses can easily incorporate reusable packaging with minimal investment or additional work on the businesses' part. There are many emerging e-commerce reusable packaging companies that establish a system of shipping and collection of consumer packaging.

The US reusable company, [LimeLoop](#), provides retail businesses with reusable packaging, reverse logistics, visibility, and analytics. In a case study they performed with sustainable clothing company Toad & Co, the implementation of reusable packaging for delivery and collection resulted in a [53% increase in customer engagement, 93% resource savings, and 41% savings on packaging and inventory](#). Their packaging is made of upcycled billboard vinyl and lined with recycled cotton, and each can be reused over 200 times. To return the packaging, the customer flips the return label and sends the empty package back to the retailer to be used again. Reusable consumer packaging can also [foster customer loyalty](#), which translates into longer-term profitability. Similar services are available in Canada with companies such as [QUIL](#).



## Business Case for Reusables

On the B2B side of operations, there are also reusable changes to be made that will result in cost savings and higher profit margins. Specifically, transport packaging and display of goods is a fantastic place to start your reusable journey. For example, Andronico's supermarkets and two Food Maxx wholesale grocery outlets in the US transitioned to reusable plastic containers for shipping and display of their in-store produce. Specifically, baby carrots and red grapes were tracked to understand the potential impact of reusable packaging. The reusable shipping containers were found to offer some great upsides. Unlike the waxed single-use cardboard packaging previously used, the reusable plastic containers are rigid and easily stackable, have built-in handgrips, and are moisture-resistant. The reusables provided better ventilation, improved freshness, and lowered cooling costs. This can ultimately reduce spoilage and shrinkage throughout the entire shipping and display process. Average cost savings from using reusables for transport and display of fresh produce are significant. In labour, approximately **\$1,250 was saved per item** by the participating businesses. In disposal costs, **\$500 per item was saved**. For each participating retailer, there was an average total annual **savings of \$1,750 per item** switched to reusable packaging.

These are just two examples of the advantages associated with the transition to reusables in the retail space. As the reusable economy develops, and reverse logistics systems become more popular, the opportunities to switch to reusables will continue to develop. **Each of these changes will provide benefits to the retail business owner in terms of both environmental sustainability and financial savings.**



## 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:

- [ReSource Exchange Marketplace](#)
- [Playbook to Encourage Consumer Reusable Bags at Retail](#)
- [QUIL reusable packaging and shipping options](#)
- [GOATOTE reusable bag service for retail stores](#)
- [Mobile commercial refillable cleaning supplies with Rethink BioClean](#)

# Thank you!

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