



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Single-Use Plastics Ban: Common Questions and Answers

October 2023

Q&As

Q. What single use plastic items are/ will be subject to bans or restrictions from 1 October 2023?

From 1 October 2023, the following items will be subject to bans:

- Single use plastic cutlery
- Single use plastic balloon sticks
- Expanded and extruded polystyrene food and drinks containers
- Expanded and extruded polystyrene cups

From 1 October 2023, the following items will be subject to restrictions:

- Single use plastic plates, bowls, and trays

Subject to existing bans:

- Single use plastic drink stirrers
- Microbeads in rinse-off personal care products

Subject to existing restrictions:

- Single use plastic straws
- Plastic stemmed cotton buds
- *We also continue to have a 10 pence charge for single-use plastic carrier bags.*

Only items listed here are subject to bans or restrictions e.g. a cup that is not made from expanded or extruded polystyrene is not banned.

Q. Can I still supply single use plastic plates, bowls or trays filled with food for customers e.g. in a takeaway restaurant?

Only when used for packaging. You can still supply and provide single-use plastic plates, bowls and trays if the items are packaging (pre-filled or filled at the point of sale).

An example of this would be a takeaway restaurant filling a single use plastic bowl with food and sending this to customers for consumption. For clarity, plastic plates, bowls, and trays that are used as packaging can be used in eat-in and takeaway settings. However, we strongly encourage businesses to explore how they can reduce the use of these single-use items and move to reusable alternatives instead e.g. reusable metal cutlery rather than disposable plastic.

Q. Are polystyrene coffee cup lids banned?

No. You can continue to supply coffee cups with polystyrene lids, provided the cup itself is not made from expanded or extruded polystyrene.

Q. Can I still supply single use plastic plates, bowls or trays if they are not filled at the point of sale but will be by another business e.g. a business which supplies products for other businesses?

Yes, you can still supply single-use plastic plates, bowls and trays if you are supplying them to another business (even if they are not filled at the point of sale).

An example of this would be a distribution company or supplier of single use plastic products that sell single use plastic plates, bowls or trays to another business. It is the responsibility of the other business to ensure these are then filled at the point of sale to the end user.

Q. Can I use biodegradable or compostable plastic alternatives?

No, these items when made from biodegradable and compostable plastics are subject to the same restrictions as these items when made from fossil-based plastics. Biodegradable and compostable plastics are still plastics (even if they are made from plant-based feedstocks). This is consistent with our previous single-use plastic bans.

Q. Why does the ban encompass bio-based and compostable plastics?

Yes. Bio-based and compostable plastics are still plastics. Depending on the polymer, bio-based feedstocks can be used to produce the same plastics as conventional fossil-based feedstocks.

Generally, compostable plastics are not designed for reuse and are therefore inherently single use in nature. Additionally, the current standard for compostable plastic (EN 13432) requires treatment in industrial composting facilities. The Standard does not require total breakdown of plastics in the final compost, so may be a source of microplastic pollution.

Our 2021 Government response to our call for evidence on standards for bio-based, biodegradable and compostable plastics provides more detail on our position. You can read the Government response here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/standards-for-biodegradable-compostable-and-bio-based-plastics-call-for-evidence>

In our consultation, it clearly stated that the proposed restrictions would “include all plastics, including bio-based, biodegradable and compostable plastics. We asked respondents about this proposal and the significant majority agreed - 78% for plastic plates and cutlery, 79% for Expanded & Extruded Polystyrene (EPS) food and beverage containers, and 81% for plastic balloon sticks.

Q. Why does the ban encompass biodegradable plastics?

Biodegradable plastics are inherently single use and do not work with circular economy principles.

There is an inadequate evidence base to support claims by manufacturers that biodegradable plastics degrade fully and are not a source of microplastic pollution. Our 2021 Government response to our call for evidence on standards for bio-based, biodegradable and compostable plastics provides more detail on our position. You can read the Government response here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/standards-for-biodegradable-compostable-and-bio-based-plastics-call-for-evidence>

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Q. Are there any exceptions where I can supply single use plastic cutlery?

No

Q. Are there any exceptions where I can supply single use expanded and extruded polystyrene food and drink containers?

This is a ban on single-use expanded and extruded polystyrene food and drinks containers that are used to contain food and drink that is ready-to-consume. This includes polystyrene cups.

Therefore, you can continue to use and be supplied with polystyrene containers for other uses, such as to transport unprocessed or unprepared food. For example, polystyrene boxes used to transport frozen fish are not in scope of the ban.

Q. Can I still use up the existing stock I have after 1 October 2023?

No, there are no provisions to use up existing stock. From 1 October businesses will need to find alternative substitutes or reuse solutions for these items.

The Government Response to the consultation on these bans, published in January, set out that these restrictions would be introduced from October 2023 instead of April 2023, giving businesses more time to prepare.

Q. What can businesses do about their unused stock?

We encourage businesses to recycle unused stock where possible. Businesses will need to seek Local Authority guidance to determine what can be recycled in their area.

Defra's view is that individuals not acting in the course of a business can donate stock to a non-business, for example a charity such as a homeless shelter, where there is no gain to a business. Please note this should not be relied on as legal advice.

Q. How will these bans be enforced?

These bans will be enforced by Local Authorities through their Trading Standards officers. A range of enforcement options have been provided, including both civil and criminal sanctions. These options include a compliance notice, non-compliance penalty, stop notice, and fixed monetary penalty.

Q. Why the exemption for packaging for single use plastic bowls plates and trays?

This is to avoid duplication or confusion with Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging, which will be coming into effect in the near future.

Q. Is all extruded polystyrene banned?

Only polystyrene that has been through a foaming process is in the scope of this ban. Foaming is a method of expansion of the material at any point during its manufacture by any means, using any blowing agent.

For the purposes of this ban, products made from polystyrene that has first been extruded, then expanded are extruded polystyrene products.

Further information

- More information about the Single Use Plastics ban can be found on [GOV.uk](https://www.gov.uk)
- Download the [Single Use Plastics ban poster](#) to see what items are included and what items are exempt
- Access the [Single Use Plastics ban toolkit](#) for quick access to useful communication tools

If you have any questions about what the new rules mean for your business, please [contact Plastics.Consultation@defra.gov.uk](mailto:Plastics.Consultation@defra.gov.uk).