



**Chantler
Packages**

insights

plastics reduction and the future of packaging



the plastics reduction movement affects the future of packaging

Plastics reduction is in the news. Every week, another news report tells us that supermarkets are trying to eliminate plastic packaging, or cities are banning drinking straws. What do these actions mean for companies that use plastic packaging to get their products to market? How can companies adapt to these new developments?

the coming changes



The Canadian federal government announced a series of actions to reduce plastic waste in the environment. On June 10, the government circulated a backgrounder, [“Government of Canada taking action to reduce plastic pollution.”](#) This report listed several policy goals, a few of which I’ll discuss below:

- 1) Banning harmful single-use plastics
- 2) Ensuring that companies that manufacture plastic products or sell items with plastic packaging are responsible for managing the collection and recycling of their plastic waste
- 3) Investing in new Canadian technologies

Let’s look in more detail at these three points...

1 banning harmful single-use plastics

The backgrounder mentions a few facts about this coming ban:

The ban will focus on single-use plastic products and packaging:

- Shopping bags (e.g. t-shirt bags or carrier bags)
- Straws
- Cutlery
- Plates
- Stir sticks

What do these products have in common? It is relatively easy for consumers to find substitutes for these products now, and eliminating them from the marketplace is unlikely to cause a lot of business disruption for brand-owners or retailers.



A requirement to include a certain amount of recycled plastic in packaging and products may be coming. Mandating a certain amount of recycled content could mean dramatic changes to packaging materials. Most types of plastic food packaging, like flexible packaging, cannot be made with post-consumer recycled content for food safety reasons.

Recyclability may become a criteria to avoid being banned. This should encourage innovation in areas like recyclable standup pouches, which are now being developed by packaging manufacturers.

2 ensuring manufacturers/sellers of plastic products manage collection/recycling of their waste

This concept is called “extended producer responsibility” (EPR) and is a big trend in waste reduction. EPR programmes have been around for decades in Europe and Asia. In North America, British Columbia runs an EPR programme to manage curbside waste. The concept is that “the producer pays.” In other words, companies who introduce plastic packaging (or disposable plastic products) into the marketplace are responsible for their collection and recycling.

At its most basic form, the EPR concept means that brand owners will pay the cost of curbside recycling programmes. But a lot of innovation is taking place around the idea that brand owners can, either individually or cooperatively, opt to manage the collection and recycling of their own packaging.



One real-life example is Nespresso, the coffee brewing system developed by Nestlé that uses small aluminium coffee pods.



Nespresso sends out pod return bags to its customers, who fill the bags with spent pods. The pods go back to Nespresso stores (or are sent through the post), where they are recycled. This type of closed-loop recycling can be very efficient because material collected this way is not contaminated with other recyclables, and is therefore of higher value in the recycled material market.

The Province of Ontario is already working on implementing EPR, according to [recent news reports](#).

3 investing in new Canadian technologies

The federal government's Canadian Plastics Innovation Challenge has already disbursed some \$10 million to companies developing innovative ways to reduce plastic waste or enhance recyclability.



Beyond the Innovation Challenge, a host of companies in Canada and abroad are working to commercialize innovations designed to reduce plastic waste. Many of these developments are ground-breaking.

Some of them involve the “holy grail” of plastic recycling: taking a mix of post-consumer material collected at curbside, and turning it into plastic products that have the same value per kg. as virgin material.

For example, [GreenMantra](#) is an Ontario company that takes post-consumer plastic waste, and reverses the polymerization process, taking the material back to its origin as a feedstock. This feedstock is then used to create high-quality industrial waxes that are used in the roofing, paving, and plastic processing industries.

what can brand-owners do?

Brand-owners who use flexible plastic packaging to package their products have options. Action can be taken even before legislation is finalized.

optimize packaging to use the minimum amount of material

- Lightweight packaging as much as possible; this is the single greatest contributor to packaging sustainability that brand-owners can make.
- This will reduce the EPR / sustainability fees that will be, or are now, payable on plastic packaging.
- Tell consumers, right on the package, how many tonnes of packaging waste are saved per year with the optimized packaging (e.g. “We reduced the weight of this bread bag and now we will be reducing our plastics use by 20 tonnes per year”).
- Go one step further and show consumers how many tonnes of CO₂, water, and energy are saved with the optimized packaging (e.g. “This plastic bag is 20% thinner than our old bag, and saves the equivalent of 400 tonnes of CO₂ emissions each year”).



be careful substituting packaging materials

- Switching to oxodegradable plastics (plastics that break down with exposure to the environment) is an option but this material class is being banned in the European Union and may one day be banned in Canada.
- Compostable plastic retail packaging is not compostable by Canadian municipalities and may not save brand-owners any recycling fees.
- Paper or other “natural” materials must be laminated with plastics and foils to make primary food packaging, so the resulting packaging cannot be composted or recycled (with some important exceptions like Tetra-Paks).





about the author

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Ian is the operational lead for Chantler Packages. Part of the Packages Group of Companies, Chantler Packages makes and sells packaging materials to the food industry. Chantler Packages specializes in flexible plastic packaging that protects the quality and healthiness of food, while delivering brand messaging to the consumer.

Ian has an MBA from the Rotman School of Management (Toronto). He advises Canadian food brands on packaging innovation and packaging optimization. He is a co-chair of PAC's food waste working group and has a strong interest in packaging innovation and packaging sustainability.



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