



## THE EU'S RECYCLING ROADMAP

The EU has set a goal of recycling 10 mt of plastic per year by 2025.

The lengthy declaration and its commitments for reaching the EU target, set by the European Strategy for Plastics, were presented and adopted at an event in Brussels, Belgium, today (20 September). The alliance, made up of public and private stakeholders in plastics value chains, is part of the Commission's efforts to reduce littering of plastics, to increase the volume of plastic material that is recycled, and to stimulate market innovation.



*Signatories of the Circular Plastics Alliance. Source: [ec.europa.eu](https://ec.europa.eu).*

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PLASTIC RECYCLING IN THE EU STILL HAS SIGNIFICANT ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT, ESPECIALLY IF COMPARED TO THE ADVANCED PAPER, GLASS AND METAL RECYCLING.

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More than 90 EU trade associations, companies, public authorities and members states involved in the plastics value chains have

signed so far.

The declaration states that the alliance "endorses the ambitious target that by 2025 at least 10 million tonnes of recycled plastics should find their way into products and packaging in Europe each year, helping to deliver the circular economy with a life cycle approach." It describes plastics and plastic waste as "valuable resources for the circular economy" and that increasing plastic waste collection for recycling contributes to reducing plastic pollution.

"We will join our forces to realize the full potential of recycled plastics in the circular economy and help the European market for recycled plastics grow steadily in the future, with policies and measures that facilitate the free movement of plastic waste for recycling and recycled plastics in the EU," it adds.

Commitments include developing, revising and regularly updating design-for-recycling guidelines for all plastic products, aimed at improving the recyclability of plastic products in order to deliver the volumes and quality of recycled plastics necessary to meet the end market needs. A work plan for the delivery of the necessary guidelines will be agreed by 1 March 2020, it says.

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THE DECLARATION ALSO SPECIFIES THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SHIFT TO ZERO PLASTIC WASTE TO NATURE, ZERO LANDFILLING OF PLASTIC WASTE, AND THAT ALL PLASTIC WASTE SHOULD BE PROPERLY DISPOSED OF AND COLLECTED.

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It also commits by 1 January 2021 to deliver "an overview of the current status of the production of recycled plastics in the EU, identify untapped potential for more recycling and map the necessary investments in recycling facilities in each member state to reach the 10 MMt/y target."

The declaration also specifies that there should be a shift to zero plastic waste to nature, zero landfilling of plastic waste, and that all plastic waste should be properly disposed of and collected. It called for all EU public authorities "to eliminate the landfilling of plastic waste in their territory," and said it would work to create a framework for the separate collection of all plastic waste to optimize the sorting process for quality recycling.

A commitment by 1 June 2020 is also made in the declaration to deliver a "state-of-play" on collected and sorted plastic waste in the EU, identify untapped potential for more collection and sorting for recycling and by 1 January 2021 to "map the necessary investments in collection and sorting facilities and infrastructures in each member state to reach the 10 MMt/y target." It added a call for all EU public authorities to contribute to the analysis and "make or foster the necessary investments."





*Paper and cardboard at a recycling facility in Germany.*

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APPROXIMATELY 15% OF PLASTIC WASTE GENERATED IN THE EU CURRENTLY FINDS ITS WAY BACK INTO THE EU MARKET, WITH THE ONLY RECYCLING TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE NOW AT LARGE SCALE BEING MECHANICAL RECYCLING, ACCORDING TO CEFIC.

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It reiterated the alliance's commitment to increase the uptake of recycled plastics up to at least 10 MMt/y in all plastic products, whilst ensuring product quality and safety. By 1 January 2021 it will "identify the legal, economic and technical requirements ensuring more uptake of recycled plastics and report on these with solutions," it adds.

It has also put its weight behind further R&D and investment, including the scale-up of chemical recycling solutions, in order to achieve the EU target. By 1 March 2020 it will develop an R&D agenda on circular plastics to address the technological barriers to meet the market and regulatory needs, it says. It will also, by 1 January 2021, "map the investments and funding needed in collection, sorting, recycling and converting of plastics, and list the technological, economic and regulatory challenges to make these investments."

By 1 January 2021 it also commits to set up a harmonized and transparent EU value chain voluntary system to monitor volumes of recycled plastics used in European products. The volumes of plastics monitored should preferably be by mass balance, by polymer, country, market segment and legal compliances, it says, with the products measured on an aggregate tonnage basis in order to track the 10 MMt/y target.

A steering committee will be formed from a representative group of the signatories to co-ordinate the alliance's activities, establish roles and responsibilities, establish working groups and produce annual reports.





*PET bottles at PILOT Corporation's recycling plant in France.*

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COMPLEMENTING MECHANICAL WITH CHEMICAL RECYCLING WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO SOLVE THE EU PLASTIC WASTE PROBLEM AND ACHIEVE THE ALLIANCE'S TARGET OF HAVING 10 MMt/Y OF RECYCLED PLASTIC PUT BACK INTO PRODUCTS BY 2025.

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The European Commission launched the Circular Plastics Alliance in December last year following the preliminary assessment of voluntary pledges. Pledges from suppliers of recycled plastics at that time were sufficient to reach the EU target for recycled plastics by 2025, but pledges from users of recycled plastics (such as plastics converters and manufacturers) were not sufficient, it said.

Earlier this year it was confirmed pledges had exceeded targets in four value chains: polyolefins, polyvinyl chloride, polyethylene terephthalate, and expandable polystyrene. Buyers had pledged to purchase 6.4 MMt/y of recycled plastic by 2025, while producers had pledged to provide the full 10 MMt/y.

The European Chemical Industry Council (Cefic) was one of the declaration's signatories and said today the chemical industry could play a leading role by scaling up chemical recycling technology. Approximately 15% of plastic waste generated in the EU currently finds its way back into the EU market, with the only recycling technology available now at large scale being mechanical recycling, according to Cefic.

"Chemical recycling is a game-changer for plastic recycling as it means that more types of plastics can be transformed into new material. Scaling up this technology will make Europe the global leader in circular economy solutions. Complementing mechanical with chemical recycling will be essential to solve the EU plastic waste problem and achieve the alliance's target of having 10 MMt/y of recycled plastic put back into products by 2025," said Cefic's president Daniele Ferrari.

The transformation from linear to circular systems "can only be achieved with the support of many partners from different sectors. The foundation of the Circular Plastics Alliance is an important step in this direction. Europe can provide impetus here worldwide," says Dr. Markus Steilemann, CEO of Covestro, another signatory. As one of the world's leading materials manufacturers, Covestro says it wants to help "design plastics from the outset in such a way that they are ultimately easily recyclable. In addition, the company can contribute

THE EUROPEAN CHEMICAL INDUSTRY COUNCIL (CEFIC) WAS ONE OF THE DECLARATION'S SIGNATORIES AND SAID TODAY THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY COULD PLAY A LEADING ROLE BY SCALING UP CHEMICAL RECYCLING TECHNOLOGY.

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its high level of research competence and innovative strength – for example to promote the development of chemical recycling.” It also wants to "give impetus" to making the collection and sorting of waste as efficient as possible, it adds.

Another significant signatory was EuroCommerce, the principal European organization representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, including global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco.

"In joining the alliance, we will support our members in reducing plastics use, and in reinforcing dialogue with stakeholders in the supply chain and with regulators. Such a collaborative approach is vital to building the technical and regulatory framework to upscale circular business models. Equally central to creating the conditions for this to succeed is to underpin industry efforts with efficient European systems of waste collection and sorting," commented director-general Christian Verschueren.