



# A Guide to Sustainable Food Packaging 2022 Summary

# Introduction

Sodexo are committed to reducing our impact on the environment and making any improvements possible in relation to the prevention and reduction of single use packaging in our operations, including single use plastics (SUP).

SUP items are made wholly or partially of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once, and / or for a short period of time, before being disposed of.

Many of these 'single use' items end up in landfills, incinerators, or worse littering the environment or the world's oceans where it can cause significant harm.

There are also other wider environmental impacts with the depletion of non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels in the manufacturing process and the generation of air and water pollutants from manufacturing, shipping and disposal.

However, foodservice packaging is an important part of how consumers receive food products and is a necessity particularly as 'to go' food and drink continues to increase in popularity with consumers.

## **Sodexo Commitments**

Sodexo UK&I have made a commitment to ensure foodservice disposable packaging is [100% reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025](#).

This is a key initiative as part of our roadmap to fully decarbonise our activities and reach [Net Zero by 2045](#). Preventing, reusing and switching to recyclable packaging not only reduces our scope 3 emissions associated with the material waste we produce at client sites, but also the emissions that are embedded in the production and transportation of the packaging.

We have been making significant progress and as of March 2021, we have removed over 38 million items of single use plastic from our operations (Fig1).

This includes a ban on single use plastic straws, stirrers, plates, bags and cutlery, as well as items made from polystyrene where alternatives exist.

We continue to work in collaboration with suppliers and partners to introduce reusable options, increase recycling rates at our client sites and evaluate sustainable alternatives to SUPs.

The challenge SUP presents is large and we continue to ensure we are doing all we can to reduce the impact of our operations.

# WORKING TOWARDS A FUTURE THAT IS FREE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Look at what we have achieved so far

**95%**

In October 2018, only 1% of the bags we sold were reusable or widely recyclable. Today, it's around 95%

**1.8M**

By introducing wooden stirrers, we've eliminated 1.8 million plastic ones from our operations



**500,000**

We've prevented the use of 500,000 cups per year by encouraging the use of reusable cups

**830,000**

We've introduced recycling points for cups, and have recycled over 830,000 drinks cups in the past year



**15M**

We've removed 15 million items of single use plastic cutlery, and have also eliminated 21,000 single use plastic plates



**590,000**

By introducing reusable bags, we have driven out 590,000 single-use plastic bags from circulation



**19M**

By switching to environmentally friendly and recyclable products, we've removed 19 million expandable polystyrene items from our business



**1,500,000**

We've stopped providing plastic straws and have eliminated 1.5 million from our business

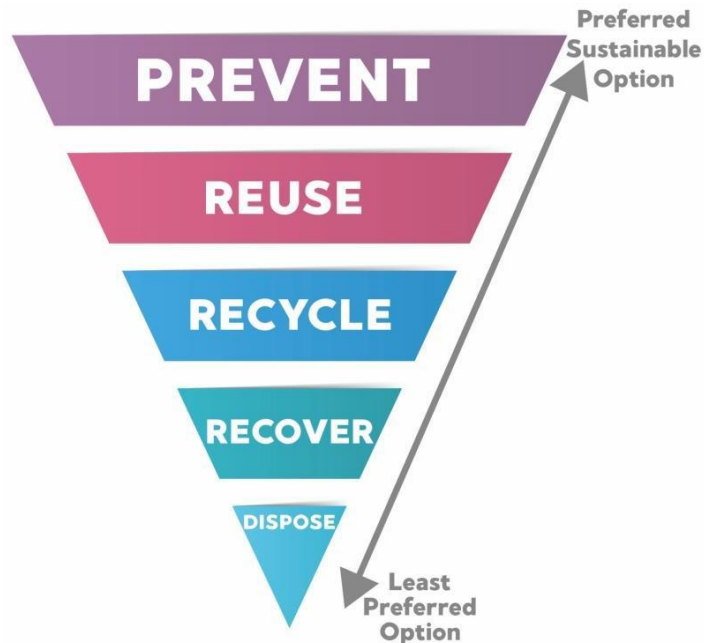


**sodexo**  
QUALITY OF LIFE SERVICES

Fig1 – Sodexo UK&I FY21 Achievements

# Overview

The disposable food packaging hierarchy of prevent, reuse, recycle, recover and dispose, will help you to make the most sustainable choices for single use disposable packaging.



## PREVENT

The most sustainable option is to prevent packaging in the first instance. This involves moving away from single use disposable products and towards durable, reusable, recyclable and repairable goods. For example, banning and removing non-sustainable items, such as plastic straws.

## REUSE

Reusing items prevents products being added into the waste stream and also deters the need to produce new products. Examples include reusable cups and cutlery.

## RECYCLE

Where waste cannot be prevented or reused, recycling offers a more compelling opportunity to divert waste from landfill and energy recovery technologies. Where applicable, choose recyclable materials, such as cardboard.

## RECOVER

Where it is not possible to prevent, reuse or recycle packaging products, the next best option is to send the waste to a recovery process, such as energy from waste. The waste will be incinerated and the resultant waste heat can be harvested and used for electricity generation.

## DISPOSE

When absolutely no other option is available, waste will be sent to landfill.

# Prevent

**The most sustainable option is to prevent packaging in the first instance. This involves moving away from single use disposable products and towards durable, reusable, recyclable and repairable goods.**

The target for all food service locations should be to reach and maintain a zero-waste operation.

Changing our behaviours and adopting the following best practices will reduce our waste contributions significantly:

- **Restricting Usage:** Consider banning or restricting access to paper straws, condiments, napkins and other disposable items by storing them behind the counter. Alternatively, use devices that control the amount of product a customer can take, such as the 'TakeOne' device that can be used for napkins.
- **Reusable Cups:** Encourage customers to bring their own coffee cups and discourage the use of single use disposable products. All Sodexo outlets are now able to accept any brand of reusable cup. Consider offering a discount to users with reusable cups or adding a levy for those who request a disposable cup.
- **Reusable Containers:** Consider reusable 'to-go' containers instead of disposables.
- **Reusable bottles:** Encourage consumers to switch from buying bottled water to using a reusable bottle.
- **Water Fountains and Bottle Refill Points:** Discuss with your client the possibility of installing drinking fountains and bottle refill points to provide free tap water.
- **Sustainable purchasing practices:** Ask yourself, is there an option to purchase in bulk or with less packaging? Or are more widely recyclable or environmentally friendly products available?

# Reuse

**Reusing items prevents products being added into the waste stream and also deters the need to produce new products.**

The durability of reusable items is crucial to ensure they are used multiple times, replacing the hundreds of items that would be disposed of if a single use disposable item was used.

Adopting the following best practices will reduce waste contributions significantly:

- **Cups and Mugs:** Consider switching to china mugs for hot drinks and durable plastic cups for cold drinks to replace disposable coffee cups and plastic water cups.
- **Ceramic Plates and Bowls:** Provide china or durable plates, bowls and containers wherever possible in café, restaurant and canteen areas so they can be washed and reused.
- **Cutlery:** Replace disposable cutlery, such as plastic and wooden cutlery and stirrers, with stainless steel cutlery that can be reused many times.

# Recycle

**Where waste cannot be prevented or reused, recycling offers a more compelling opportunity to divert waste from landfill and energy recovery technologies.**

It is important to consider the whole packaging life cycle of products when making the decision:

- **Product Design:** Select products that have a high percentage of recycled content, this conserves virgin materials and resources, saving energy and reducing pollution and waste.
- **Product Manufacture & Distribution:** Products should be selected that are produced and distributed locally and are not reliant on energy intensive fossil fuel production.
- **End of life:** Consider products that can be easily segregated, sorted and recycled. The main route for recycling is via a source segregated or mixed recycling waste stream, such as dry mixed recycling. Composting is also considered recycling, but composting facilities are limited in the UK. See our [Composting Guide](#) for more information.

To maximise the volume of packaging that is recycled ensure that the correct waste streams and systems have been setup and established, including:

- **Internal Waste Containers:** Certain waste types can only be recycled if they are source segregated, others can be placed into a mixed recycling stream. The correct bins should be selected to capture the waste types being produced, which need to be strategically positioned in areas where high volumes are being produced.
- **Waste signage and labelling:** Understand what waste types can be placed into each bin. Speak to your or the client's waste contractor to understand what will be accepted. It is important to ensure that the bins are labelled correctly.
- **Disposal Routes:** Understand what happens with your waste when it leaves site to ensure that it actually gets recycled as it was intended. This information should be detailed as part of the site's Waste Management Manual.

Review the tools and resources available on the [DMS – Waste Management](#)

# Recovery and disposal

Where it is not possible to prevent, reuse or recycle packaging products, the next best option is to send the waste to a recovery process, such as energy from waste. The waste will be incinerated and the resultant waste heat can be harvested and used for electricity generation.

Incinerating processes used to emit toxic pollutants into air, land and water given the absence of effective controls. However, modern technologies are now available to reduce the pollutants preventing this negative impact on the environment.

When absolutely no other option is available, waste will be sent to landfill.

# Key terms

## Recyclable

**Recyclable can be reprocessed and used again.** Most of our sites have a dry mixed recycling bin through which clean and dry materials can be recycled. Examples are paper, cardboard, PET plastic, aluminium.

## Biodegradable

**Biodegradable** refers to the ability of materials to break down and disintegrate by biological means. They are typically composed of organic matter that can be readily decomposed by a wide variety of microorganisms. Examples include a biodegradable cardboard tray or coffee cups sleeve.

Technically, however, biodegradable packaging can be composed of almost any material because with enough time, some microorganisms can decompose almost anything. This label on a package therefore gives no unique information except that the product's manufacturer is attentive to the consumer's concern about litter.

## Compostable

**Compostable** products are like biodegradable products in that they are both intended to break down and disintegrate but compostable materials go one step further by providing the earth with nutrients once the material has broken down. While biodegradable products are designed to break down in landfills, compostable materials require special composting conditions and must meet strict standards. Examples include products made from corn, potato and soy.

Unfortunately there are a limited number of composting facilities in the UK at the moment, so before choosing compostable materials, contact your waste contractor to ensure the materials will actually be recycled in an industrial composting facility.

Compostable packaging cannot be placed into a mixed recycling stream as it will contaminate the other recyclables and result in all the waste being treated as general waste.

See our [Composting Guide](#) for more information.

