



KEY MESSAGES FOR BUSINESSES

The following key messages aim to assist business leaders in implementing the Recommendations for Action from “Can I Recycle This?” A Global Mapping and Assessment of Standards, Labels and Claims on Plastic Packaging (UNEP & Consumers International 2020¹). Business action and collaboration are required to improve consumer information and encourage a more circular economy for plastic packaging.

Adopt consumer information tools that are fully aligned with the principles of the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information*

1. Sustainability information and imagery to be clear and relevant

Information and imagery causing consumer confusion and mistrust primarily happen because:

- Sustainability information on-pack is irrelevant and cannot be applied by consumers.
- Information is not easily understood by consumers. For example, claims centred around plastics being “biobased”, “biodegradable” and “compostable” do not provide any information about how a product should be used or disposed of.

- Imagery on labels is misleading and confusing. For example, the use of the ‘chasing arrows’ design for labels and claims other than for recyclability and the presence of Resin Identification Codes (RIC).
- Some claims or self-declared labels on plastic packaging are designed to resemble ecolabels which can be misleading to consumers when these communications are not backed by credible schemes (for example, third-party certification).

ACTIONS

Businesses should use the ‘chasing arrows’ design for recyclability claims only, to minimise the potential for misinterpretation and confusion. All symbols and graphics on-pack should be clear for consumers. This aligns with the principles of *clarity* and *accessibility* in the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information* (UN Environment & ITC, 2017², hereafter “the Guidelines”).

As resin codes are not meant as consumer information but rather for B2B communications, they should not be placed in close proximity to disposal information nor put in a prominent place on packaging. Where regulations allow, businesses whose plastic packaging has the resin codes stamped into materials should seek to ensure that the most up to date version of the codes are used.



Source: ASTM International – old RIC (left), updated RIC (right).

1 The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) & Consumers International (2020) “Can I Recycle This?” A Global Mapping and Assessment of Standards, Labels and Claims on Plastic Packaging <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/resource/can-i-recycle-global-mapping-and-assessment-standards-labels-and-claims-plastic-packaging>

2 UN Environment & ITC (2017) Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information. UNEP. <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/resource/guidelines-providing-product-sustainability-information>

Developing localised communications on plastic packaging will ensure that consumer information tools used are actionable for consumers and align with the principles of the Guidelines. For instance, materials used in packaging can be paired with local disposal information to prevent consumer confusion.

Liaising with managers of waste infrastructure and government can help to improve standardised labelling, with simple and consistent language that aligns with local recycling capabilities. Forming partnerships to develop localised communication for plastic packaging aligns with the principle of *collaboration* in the Guidelines.

See the Australasian Recycling Label and the WWF-South Africa OPRL label [case studies](#) of good practice examples for more information.

IMPACT

Ensuring consistent use of graphics and symbols will improve consistency in the market, increase consumer trust in credible labels and prevent greenwashing. This also aligns with the principle of *relevance* in the Guidelines as major hotspots will be addressed.

2. Strengthen sustainability information on e-commerce platforms

An increasing amount of consumer transactions occur online, and consumers usually cannot see the packaging when shopping online. As a result, they often do not know if a product packaging is made from plastic, is reusable, or how to dispose of it. Businesses need to inform consumers about the packaging used and their sustainability ahead of purchasing.

ACTIONS

Ensure that the e-commerce platforms are transparent, provide comprehensive information about packaging and highlight the potential for reuse schemes and reverse logistics given the high volume and frequency of deliveries.

[Crunch and Flourish](#) have developed a digital 'packaging star' label in New Zealand to let online shoppers know what packaging is made from recycled materials, what can be separated and has a higher value, and which brands are committed to improving their packaging.

The Loop scheme run by the recycling company TerraCycle has launched a project in [partnership with Tesco](#) in the UK to enable consumers to place orders on Loop products on the online store with reusable packaging guaranteed. With Loop, consumers temporarily place a 100% refundable deposit to borrow the packaging, when they have finished using the product, they can then return the items at a drop off site or schedule a free pick up and are fully refunded once the empty item is returned. Loop is also available in France and the US and in 2021 will continue to expand internationally with launches in Australia, Canada, Germany, and Japan.

IMPACT

With increasing purchases made online, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, information regarding sustainability on plastic packaging made available on digital platforms will complement on-pack information and strengthen the e-commerce setting where information is currently lacking.



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Increase circular literacy amongst consumers

Consumers will be more responsive to sustainability information on plastic packaging if labels and claims raise awareness and better inform them about the circular economy. With this information, consumers will find it easier to understand which solutions and claims are most effective in addressing plastic pollution.

ACTIONS

Redesign packaging to facilitate reuse and recycling and ensure that this is clearly communicated to the consumer through labelling and further digital information. For instance, provide information on what happens to the plastic packaging at the end of its first use and where it can be taken.

Businesses can collaborate with governments to increase awareness around what certain labels/claims stand for or do this as part of their marketing efforts. Running campaigns to better educate and inform consumers, alongside labelling and other communication efforts will help guide consumers in the marketplace.

In 2019, [Wagamama](#) redesigned their take-out packaging from black to grey to address consumer feedback that not all UK councils can recycle black plastic. The plastic bowls can also be reused, and this is communicated through the slogan 'when you're done I rinse, reuse, recycle'.

Consumer education campaigns by Nescafé Dolce Gusto have been launched in [Germany](#) and [Mexico](#) to promote recycling of their coffee capsule.

IMPACT

If consumers have a better understanding about the concept of circular economy and hierarchy of different solutions proposed to tackle plastic pollution, this will encourage behaviour change towards more effective solutions and increase their responsiveness to labels and claims on plastic packaging.



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