

France's Ambitious Plastics Recycling Plan

The French government announces a plan to boost the recycling of single-use plastics.

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On August 12, 2018, Ms. Brune Poirson, Secretary of State in charge of the ecological transition unveiled the French government's plan to improve the recycling of plastics in France. The measures announced complement those already laid out in [Biodiversity Law n°2016-1087 of August 8, 2016](#) which imposed restrictions on the marketing and use of certain categories of single use plastics as from January 1, 2018 (straws, cups, plates, etc.) (see [Environmental Code, article L.541-10-5 III](#)).

The government now expects raising consumer awareness via incentives to purchase recycled plastics. The key feature would be the implementation of a bonus-malus system whereby consumers would pay a surcharge of up to 10% of the product's price when purchasing non-recycled plastic bottles or would conversely benefit from a lower price when choosing recycled plastic containers. The plan is to make the scheme operational as soon as 2019.

However, the government remains very cautious regarding the schedule for the set-up of a bottle and can deposit return scheme (*consigne*). Under this scheme, consumers receive a small cash sum for returning empty containers; a system in place already 40 years ago in many EU countries then discontinued, and which was advocated again by the British government earlier this year in its proposed single-use plastics policy.

On the one hand, some deposit return systems are in place and working already and the French government is keen on not disrupting them. On the other, the plan is for the State to experiment jointly with certain municipalities a so-called supportive (*solidaire*) deposit return whereby consumers support and finance a humanitarian cause through their returning of their empty containers. Ultimately, the government contemplates setting-up a full-fledged deposit return system nationwide.

Furthermore, as announced by the Prime Minister in April, the government's plan to boost recycling will include a lowered VAT on recycling endeavors and an increased tax (*Taxe générale sur les activités polluantes* or *TGAP*) on the landfilling of plastics. As far as practicalities go, the collection of waste plastics will also be simplified via the uniform color coding of waste plastics bins which still varies from one place to another (!) and a simplification of the labeling of containers.

Interestingly indeed, the universal recycling symbol and the Eco-Emballages arrows indicate respectively that the product is recyclable and that a fee has been paid by the manufacturer when placing the packaging on the market. However, they are often mistaken by consumers for an indication that product is made from recycled materials. Hence, by 2020, a new symbol will be put in place by the government to signal when the product is *actually* made from recycled materials.

The production of plastics worldwide increased by 40% between 2007 and 2017, increasing from 245 to 348 million tons per year of which packaging use constitutes a major outlet. In view of this trend, the government aims at achieving a no-less than 100% plastics recycling rate as of 2025. According to [PlasticsEurope](#), a leading pan-European association which represents plastics manufacturers active in the European plastics industry, France's score was very poor in this respect with a 26.2% recycling rate in 2016 against 40.8% in the European Union on average.