

## Dispatches from Europe: A step to stem the plastic tide (<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/30/dispatches-from-europe-a-step-to-stem-the-plastic-tide/>)

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by [Clarissa Morawski and Samantha Millette](#) ()

Single-use plastics are everywhere, with most of us regularly relying on the convenience of products such as plastic bags, straws, utensils, takeaway coffee cups, food packaging and water bottles.

But it's also becoming clear we have made, used and disposed of too many. According to [one recent academic analysis](#) (<http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/3/7/e1700782>), only 9 percent of all plastic ever created has been recycled, 12 percent has been incinerated and the rest – 79 percent – has been dumped in landfills or littered in the natural environment (intentionally or not).

In an attempt to stem the tide of throwaway plastic pollution, European Union lawmakers on Oct. 24 voted to back a policy proposal that would ban some items directly and require ambitious recycling rates for others.

Leaders must still work out final details of the plastic effort, but the action last week nonetheless represents a major moment in Europe's push to address single-use plastics (and the recovery of those items) in a direct and meaningful manner.

### The path of the policy

The EU policy has been in development for some time.

On Jan. 16 of this year, the European Commission published its communication laying out a strategy for plastics in a circular economy. The first-ever EU Plastics Strategy identified key challenges, including low reuse and recycling rates for plastic waste, the greenhouse gas emissions associated with plastics production and incineration, and the presence of plastic waste in oceans. The strategy then proposed a comprehensive set of measures to address these problems.

Then, in May, the European Commission published a directive focused on single-use plastics. It proposed a new law to tackle the 10 most common plastic waste items found on Europe's beaches, as well as fishing gear (which, together, make up 70 percent of marine litter, [according to some sources](#) (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-6191585/Coca-Cola-Walmart-cut-plastic-pollution-oceans.html>)).

On Oct. 11, the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety adopted a number of amendments to strengthen certain provisions of the proposal. That set the stage for the Oct. 24 vote, in which the committee's version of the directive (a compromise text) won the backing of 571 parliament members (with just 53 against). The vote represented the clearing of a major legislative hurdle toward the proposal becoming EU law.

Under the proposal, single-use plastic items that have reusable or readily available, non-plastic alternatives would be banned from the EU market by 2021. Examples of covered products are cutlery, cotton buds, straws, stirrers, oxo-degradable plastics, and food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene.

Member states would also be obliged to separately collect and recycle 90 percent of plastic beverage containers (including caps and lids), and ensure those items contain 35 percent recycled content by 2025. In addition, member states would have an obligation to reduce the consumption of several other



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The latest recycling industry news

**Company leader discusses mixed-plastic sorting plans**  
(<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/30/company-leader-discusses-mixed-plastic-sorting-plans/>)

A Utah recycling facility plans to sort 500 to 600 tons per month of mixed plastics, selling the resulting bales into domestic markets.

**Experts offer insight on contamination, glass and more**  
(<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/30/experts-offer-insight-on-contamination-glass-and-more/>)

Industry stakeholders from around the nation convened in St. Louis last week for the 2018 Resource Recycling Conference, where the hottest topics in materials recovery received attention over two days of educational sessions.

plastic items, such as single-use food containers, by at least 25 percent. And the proposal includes provisions that would involve manufacturers of single-use plastic packaging to cover the costs of waste collection for these products, including transport, treatment and litter collection.

Similarly, member states would also have to ensure that at least 50 percent of lost or abandoned fishing gear containing plastic is collected per year, with a recycling target of at least 15 percent by 2025.

And finally, the policy states reduction measures should cover post-consumption waste from tobacco products, namely cigarette filters containing plastic. The proposal requires member states to ensure that tobacco companies reduce the amount of plastic in its filters by at least 50 percent by 2025, and 80 percent by 2030.

## Reinforcing EU's leadership role on environment

Later this month, representatives of the 28 member states will meet to agree on a joint position, and then the final negotiations to make the plan binding legislation will begin between the national governments, the European Parliament and the European Commission.

It is expected those government stakeholders will reach an agreement ("compromise amendments") on the text just before the end of the year, which would conclude with the official publishing of the legislation in May 2019. Member states would then have two years to transpose the text of the directive into their own national legislation.

The EU is often regarded as a world leader when it comes to environmental policies, and this latest directive is no exception.

While news headlines around the world continue to reveal a grim picture of discarded plastics choking albatrosses, killing fish and creating islands of garbage, in the EU real action is taking place.

Last week's vote gives hope that the tide is starting to turn on plastic pollution. It is now up to member states to translate words into action and ensure that the ambition stays high.

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## More stories about plastics

- [Company leader discusses mixed-plastic sorting plans](https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/30/company-leader-discusses-mixed-plastic-sorting-plans/)
- [China allows in more paper but still stonewalls plastic](https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/23/china-allows-in-more-paper-but-still-stonewalls-plastic/)
- [Scrap plastics outlet on the way in Southeast U.S.](https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/23/scrap-plastics-outlet-on-the-way-in-southeast-u-s/)



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## Scenes from the 2018 Resource Recycling Conference (<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/30/scenes-from-the-2018-resource-recycling-conference/>)

Industry professionals from around North America gathered in St. Louis last week, and our photo slideshow offers a glimpse at the action.

## Outreach effort nets major donations (<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/30/outreach-effort-nets-major-donations/>)

A nationwide campaign for standardized recycling labels on collection bins has received \$50 million in donated ad space from some of the largest media groups in the country.

## Largest haulers see mixed third-quarter results (<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/30/largest-haulers-see-mixed-third-quarter-results/>)

Disruptions in global recycling markets continued to hurt recycling revenues for Waste Management and Republic Services. Meanwhile, both companies mitigated the pain by charging customers new recycling fees.

## End user of cartons expands west (<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/23/end-user-of-cartons-expands-west/>)

The ReWall Company, which manufactures building materials from recovered food and drink cartons, is planning to open a \$3 million facility in Colorado next spring.

## Experts connect in the Gateway City (<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2018/10/23/experts-connect-in-the-gateway-city/>)

The ninth-annual Resource Recycling Conference has kicked off, tackling high-interest topics at a critical juncture for the North American recycling industry.

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