

# Preventing Plastic Pollution

A practical guide to reducing your  
business waste and save you money



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## Introduction

This guide is designed to reduce the impact businesses can have on plastics entering our environment. The simple tools and templates within apply to all waste streams and all business types.

Any positive action on reducing waste and plastic use will have numerous benefits to any business. Waste disposal is one of those ‘bottom line’ costs where all savings will translate directly into the profit margin. Other affirmative actions, such as moving away from single use plastics for customers or working with suppliers to embrace re-useable packaging, will take the business on a journey that sets it apart from competitors, and has excellent PR and marketing potential.

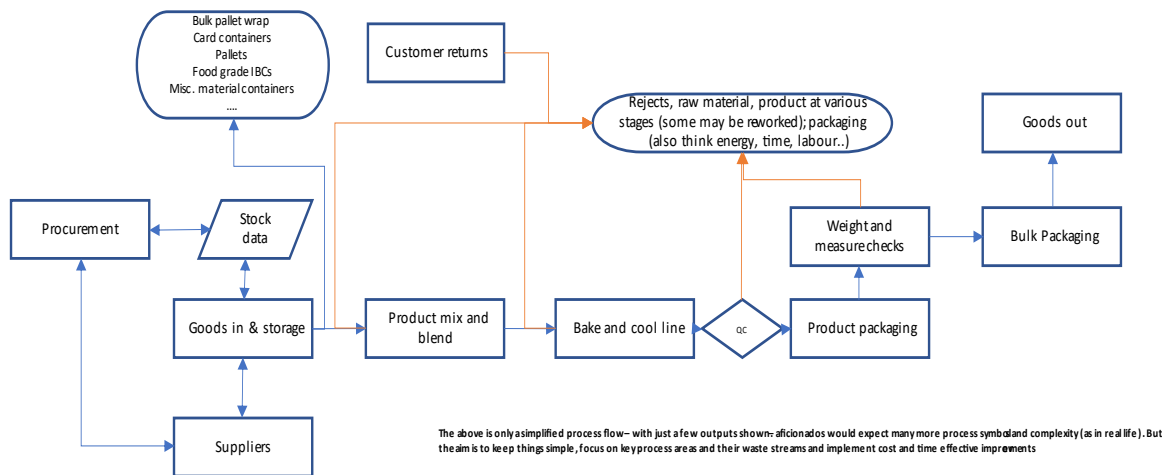
There is no ‘one-way fits all’ approach to business waste reduction. At its core it is about examining how business is undertaken and identifying the significant flows of waste and raw materials. There are many techniques that can be used – this guide gives our interpretation of a few of them.

There are two methods within this document. Although the focus centres around a ‘process review’ to determine waste and resource inputs and outputs, we also suggest a ‘dumpster dive’ - taking stock of what is going into your waste and recycling containers. We do not, however, recommend diving into your bins!

## Methodology

All businesses can be broken down into 'process steps' where each are connected to make a 'process flow'.

Figure 1 Example of a simple process flow



For waste management purposes, we focus on the inputs and outputs of these processes, i.e., raw materials, products, and waste, to get a preliminary list of items the business uses and generates. Sometimes this process flow is obvious and long (think of producing a cheesecake on a production line – a simplified version is shown in figure 1 above), sometimes it is more obscure and short (think of a coffee shop) – but the principles are the same.

A couple of things to remember:

- For most businesses – the cleaner knows the real detail about waste storage and disposal
- When looking around and asking questions – think **normal**, **abnormal**, and **emergency** situations. This is especially important when looking at the raw material and waste storage areas



## Step 1 – Build the Flow

- 🕒 Have a general talk through of the business and what goes on. Break the business down into ‘chunks’ of process by defining the activities involved in introducing plastics and other materials into, and sending them out of, the business. As a starting point nearly all businesses will have a ‘goods in’ area or process, and a ‘goods out’ in some form
- 🕒 For each process, you want to list out all ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’. Our focus is physical waste, especially plastics, but anything can be considered. For example, energy, water, labour, a cup of coffee, information, rejects etc can all be legitimate candidates for a list. For identifying waste materials and improvement opportunities, it is best to keep it simple
- 🕒 Use the 5 Y’s: “keep asking why, why, why, why, why?!” – Until you have total clarity on the aspect you are trying to understand, keep delving for more information. Do not be afraid of asking many simple ‘why’ questions that seem obvious at first glance. For example, a waste audit with a small coffee shop found they were using 2 litre milk containers, generating a lot of waste. Initially asked why, their use was put down to making it easier to handle. On delving further however, it was found to be an historic left-over from the start of the business. Subsequently they worked with their supplier and replaced them with larger bulk returnable containers.
- 🕒 Appendix 1 can be used to list the processes, plus their inputs and outputs. Appendix 2 is a space to sketch out the process flow itself

## Step 2 – Define the Opportunities

- 🕒 List all materials identified in the process flow section using the Opportunities Template in Appendix 3
- 🕒 Determine whether the material / waste is high, medium, or low impact – we suggest you use approximate volumes, mass, or cost – but keep it simple
- 🕒 For high impact items, use the Waste Hierarchy in Appendix 4 to determine opportunities.
- 🕒 A few examples:
  - Are goods coming in over-packaged?
  - Are containers sized correctly?
  - Can the containers be returned, or have the potential to be?
  - What happens to your product – is it single use? recyclable? How well are you engaged in this (be honest!)
  - What are your defect and re-work rates – do you do root cause analysis?
  - is your waste and resource storage sufficient, secure, and appropriate? Are there historic signs of escapees?
- 🕒 Be creative - do not ‘block’ ideas at this stage. As time progresses, you can work through and expand your list.
- 🕒 Consider using a ‘team workshop’ to get creative ideas from your colleagues – but make it open and non-judgemental
- 🕒 Use the RAG (**Red** / **Amber** / **Green**) traffic light system to identify each opportunity to take forward as actions. Be subjective, green should be quick wins or high impact requiring some work, orange actions require more effort, or have smaller benefits. Red should be not feasible at this time.



### Step 3 – ‘Bin Audit’

This is a nice and easy way to get instant idea of what leaves the business in the waste and recycling trucks. A few things to consider:

- ① Firstly, secondly, and always - **health and safety is paramount**. Do not get in the bins! Only collect, open, and handle the waste using a Safe Method following a full risk assessment.
- ① Consider when the waste and recycling is removed, plus *when* do people / cleaners drop material into it? The end of a day is normally most suitable for this audit
- ① Include all waste and recycling containers, i.e., do not forget office and workshop bins
- ① Do not publicise it to staff so that your findings are as representative as possible
- ① Work systematically to collect your data:
  - If possible and safe to do so, take all waste out the bin and/or skip. Be careful when opening black bin bags
  - Group your findings by material (card, plastic wrap, food waste, nurdles, sofas etc). Make an estimate of the % for each material within that bin
- ① Ask key questions:
  - Does the material belong in that bin? i.e., is it recycling? is it hazardous? Is it your businesses own waste?
  - Where has it come from? Does it tally with your process flow outputs?
- ① Include anomalies and ideas on your opportunities template and action plan. You can also link to disposal costs to monetise opportunities
- ① Repeat - this is an easy regular check for those who ‘walk their business’ as part of their management style

### Step 4 – Develop your Action Plan

- ① Appendix 5 gives you an action plan template.
- ① As mentioned, focus initially on the green opportunities (big gain and easy wins)
- ① Make your actions SMART
  - Actions should be **S**pecific – not vague
  - Make progress quantifiable or **M**easurable
  - Keep actions **A**chievable and **A**ssigned to the appropriate person
  - be **R**ealistic by ensuring resources are allocated
  - They must be **T**ime related – what is to be done by when?
- ① For larger, more complex actions and projects, a separate action and target list should be developed

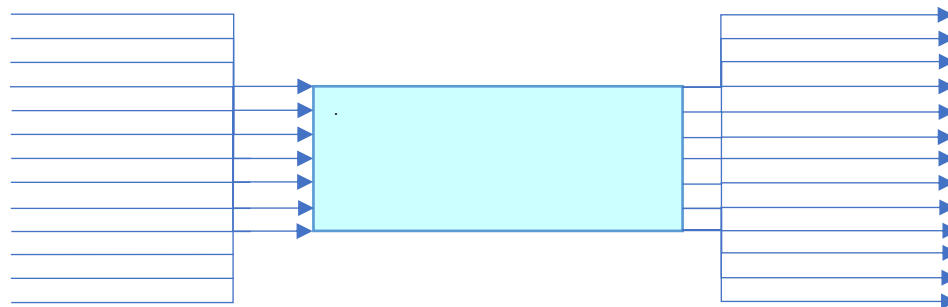
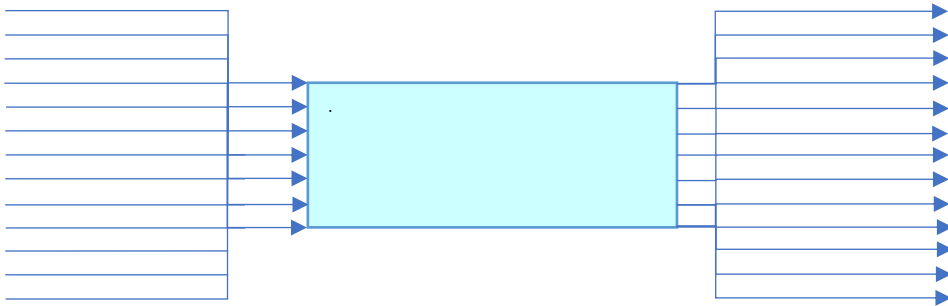
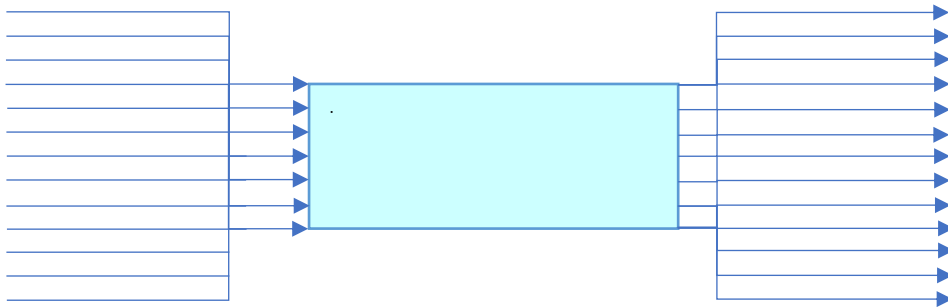
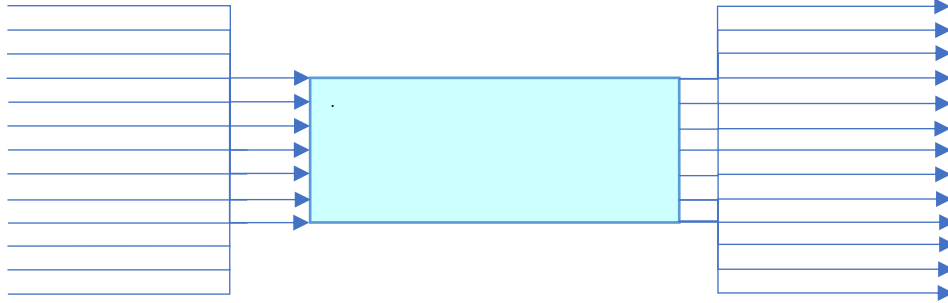
### Step 5 – Keeping it Going

One big failing of any improvement project is a lack of follow up after all the excitement of developing positive ideas and plans. Here are a few tips:

- ① Ensure the action plan is regularly monitored and progress evaluated. This needs to be a formal part of the appropriate business meeting, not an afterthought
- ① Keep your employees up to date with the programme. Post the action plan and progress reports on the staff notice board
- ① Get people involved! Willing volunteers are worth their weight in plastic waste
- ① Lead from the top – Management should show genuine enthusiasm, appreciation and take an active part – remember, most actions will save money
- ① Having an 'Idea's Box' is a great way to encourage creativity BUT it must be reviewed regularly, and **all** suggestions responded to positively, even if they are not currently suitable
- ① Consider declaring Waste or Environment Champions within your business/organisation. This is a great way to recognise and incentivise good practise and good willing, whilst harnessing knowledge and enthusiasm for many improvement projects. Ensure you give them appropriate resources and plaudits
- ① Have an agenda item to review progress at the relevant management / staff meeting
- ① Most importantly – treat this as a journey with no end

## Appendices

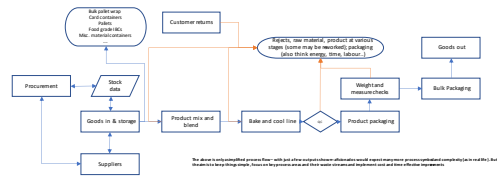
### Appendix 1 Activity Inputs and Outputs Template





## Appendix 2 Process Flow


Sketch out your process flow here  
 (example shown)







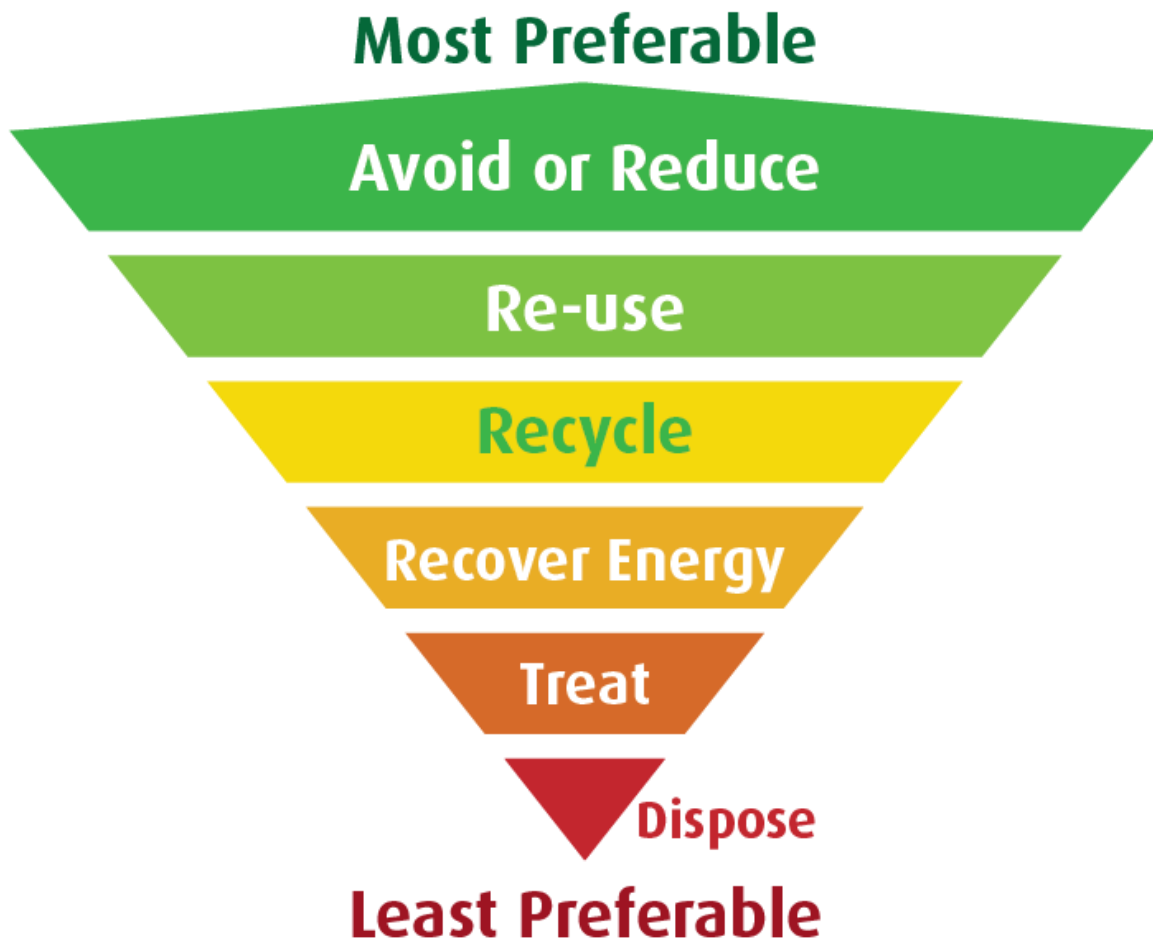
## Appendix 3 Opportunities Template

No	Material / waste	Impact High/Med/Low	What is the opportunity?	RAG
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
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24				
25				





## Appendix 4 Waste Hierarchy

There are many variations – but the following gives an example





## Appendix 5 SMART Action Plan Template

No	Material / waste	Actions		
1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		
8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>		

Make your actions **SMART** Specific – not vague; **M**asurable; Keep actions **A**chievable and **A**ssigned be **R**ealistic and lastly – they must be **T**ime related – i.e., what is to be done by when and by whom – and give them the time, funding and any other resources if needed to do it. Have an agenda item to review progress at the relevant management meetings

