

RECYCLED PLASTIC CONTENT PLEDGES WON'T SAVE THE OCEANS

The world's largest beverage brands — who are some of the worst ocean polluters according to the Break Free from Plastic annual brand audit — have pledged to increase the recycled content in their single-use plastic bottles to targets ranging mostly from 25 to 50% by 2025. These commitments form part of the brands' efforts to reduce their environmental and plastic footprint, but a new study by consulting firm Eunomia prepared for Oceana, has found that they won't do much to stop plastic pollution from overwhelming our seas. The pledges are unlikely to be met and even if they are, an estimated 93% of plastic bottle pollution will continue to flow into aquatic systems. This factsheet explains why recycled content pledges by major beverage brands won't help save the oceans and how a simple solution from the past still widely used around the world could: refillable bottles.

RECYCLING IS NOT WORKING FOR OUR OCEANS

Single-use plastic bottles end up in the oceans because they were designed to be discarded — into a garbage or recycling bin, or as litter — after only one use. The companies that sell these bottles have no control over where they end up. This depends entirely on what consumers decide to do with the bottles after using them, and the waste collection and recycling systems in the countries where they live.

In some parts of the world, especially those with large pollution issues, these systems are practically non-existent. Pledges to increase recycled content in bottles on their own won't increase bottle collection and stem the flow of plastic pollution.

Even where effective recycling systems are in place, a recycled plastic bottle doesn't necessarily turn into another bottle. Demand for recycled plastic is high and most is used to produce other packaging and products that are more difficult to recycle, including clothing fibers and plastic toys.

KEY EUNOMIA STUDY FINDINGS

- Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestle, Keurig Dr Pepper, and Danone have all pledged to increase the recycled content in their single-use polyethylene terephthalate plastic (PET) bottles to targets ranging mostly from 25 to 50% by 2025.
- If the five brands meet their recycled content targets, Eunomia predicted there will only be a 7% reduction of PET bottle pollution to aquatic systems. An estimated 33.4 billion PET bottles will still enter rivers, lakes, and oceans.
- To meet the increased demand for recycled plastic created by the pledges, a colossal 2.57 million metric tons of additional PET bottles need to be collected each year, globally.
- To successfully collect these extra bottles, the current global bottle collection rate must increase by 43% — equating to the collection of thousands more bottles each second.
- Unless highly improbable swift and significant improvements in bottle collection systems are made globally, the five beverage brands will not be able to meet their recycled content targets by 2025.

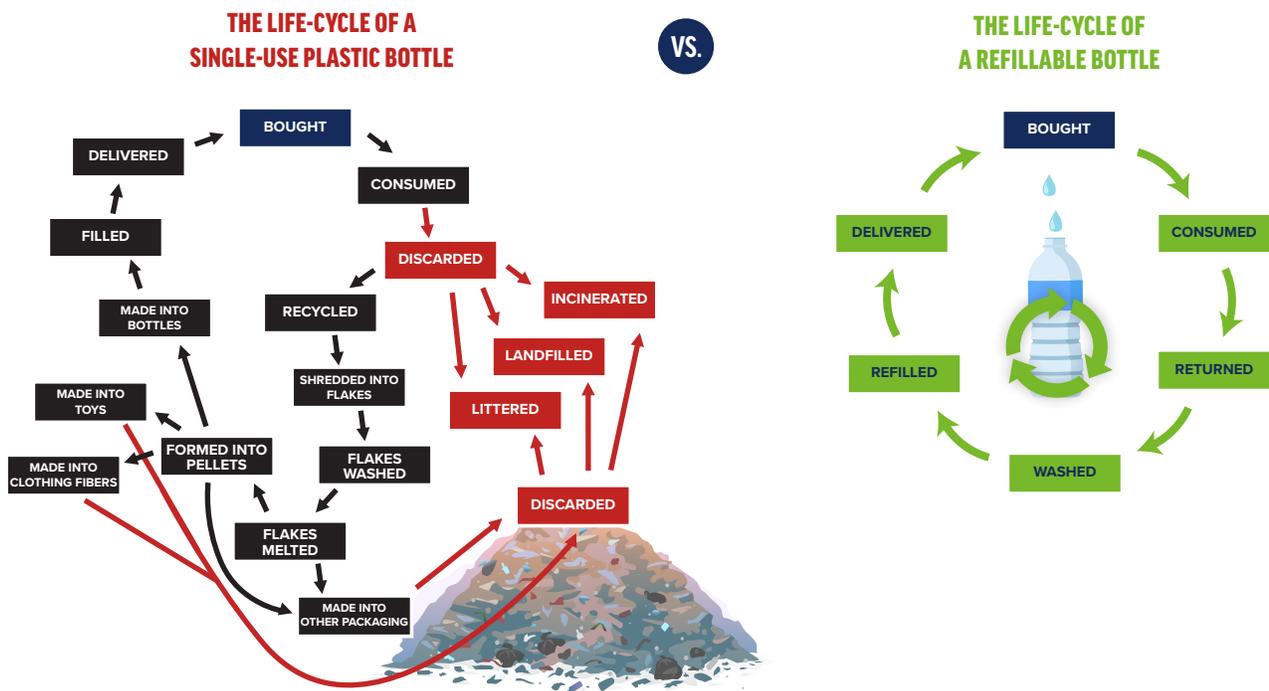


WHY REFILLABLE BOTTLES ARE A BETTER SOLUTION

Refillables offer a better solution to the problem of plastic bottles polluting our oceans. Oceana estimated that increasing refillable bottles by just 10% in all coastal counties in place of single-use plastic bottles could keep up to 7.6 billion bottles out of the ocean every year.

Refillables are a solution that makes the producer responsible for the waste they create – instead of consumers, or taxpayers that fund waste collection and recycling programs, with limited efficiencies and success in reducing plastic waste. The model is simple – consumers buy a beverage, drink it, return the bottle in exchange for a deposit, then the bottle is collected by the bottling company, washed, refilled and placed back on shelves to be bought again. Refillable bottle systems create less plastic waste as each bottle can be used up to 20 times if PET or up to 50 times if glass. Industry sources claim a 97.5% return rate of refillable bottles as a proportion of uses per year, which leaves little opportunity for these bottles to reach the oceans – far less than single-use plastic bottles, which once discarded could end up anywhere.

Until the 1970s, refillable systems were the primary way beverage companies sold billions of soft drinks around the world. Today, refillables make up nearly 23% of all non-alcoholic ready-to-drink beverages sold globally but, in many markets, they have all but disappeared, replaced by single-use plastic bottles.



For all sources and findings referenced in this fact sheet, please consult the report prepared by Eunomia at: www.oceana.org/reports/eunomia/



IT'S TIME TO REFILL AGAIN

Oceana is calling on:



Major beverage companies and bottlers around the world to expand refillable systems in existing markets and create new major markets for refillables.



Investors to seek investment opportunities with beverage companies and bottlers to fund the development and build-out of refillable bottle systems.



Governments to introduce quotas for refillable bottles, mandatory sales of refillable bottles; and legal provisions to use universal bottles for different brands.