

Single use plastics

What are single use plastics?

Single use plastics are goods and products that are made primarily of plastic material and are intended for disposal after use.

Modern society has benefited from the development of plastics in a vast range of ways, not least in how they have helped revolutionise modern medicine and food hygiene. The construction sector also gains greatly from using durable plastic products within areas such as insulation, flooring, pipes and mastic. Plastic packaging materials are essential for keeping supplies protected and dry during transportation and onsite storage.



The problem caused by single use plastics

Plastic items do not break down, so a single use plastic that may be in use for minutes will either contaminate water sources, or remain in landfill for many years.

The packaging industry in the UK is the greatest producer of waste plastic, playing a major part in the 3.7 million tonnes generated in the UK each year through items such as bottles, wrappers, straws and bags.

Ranking in second place to packaging is the construction industry. The waste derives from single use plastics used by operatives and the discarded packaging and protection products used on building components and materials. Despite the industry-wide focus on improving the situation, construction generated an estimated 98,000 tonnes of plastic waste in 2018. According to the latest DEFRA statistics¹, the UK construction industry has actually increased its plastic waste output by 45 per cent in the last two years.

The main problem faced by the construction industry is how to reduce consumption of single use plastics and deal effectively with durable plastic waste at the end of its life.

¹ DEFRA ENV23- [UK statistics on waste](#), July 2021

How to reduce single use plastics in the construction industry

Until there are viable alternatives, construction will doubtlessly continue in the short term to rely on plastic materials. A change in mind-set is therefore needed across our workforces. They need to feel empowered to proactively identify unsustainable uses of plastics and opportunities which will significantly reduce waste.

Many small changes will have an impact in the battle against single use plastics. Within Overbury, we have implemented the following:

- Site signage is no longer made from PVC but instead from non-plastic materials that have at least 70% recycled content.
- Site consumables are no longer plastic, instead we use unlined paper cups and biodegradable wooden cutlery.
- Working closely with supply chain and subcontractors can identify plastic items used onsite in order to identify alternative products and materials.

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Eliminate single use plastic on our sites.

Why is it a problem?

- 25% of packaging** construction waste by weight is plastic.
- 23% of plastic** produced in the UK is consumed by the construction industry.
- 8 million plastic pieces** find their way into our oceans everyday!

What can you do?

- DESIGN** Integrate Plastic Reduction Clauses into design and contractor briefs.
- CONSULT** Challenge clients to promote plastic-free alternatives on projects with their suppliers.
- ENGAGE** Review works on site and ask subcontractors and partners to replace single use plastics or return packaging to suppliers.
- REUSE** Implement closed loop recycling schemes through services.

Tell us what clever stuff you've done:
environmental.team@msfitout.com

About Overbury

At Overbury, we fit out and refurbish outstanding offices and higher education facilities across the UK. Every project is carried out by passionate people who thrive on delivering an exceptional result, precisely as promised.

Our company-wide commitment to low carbon and sustainability means we have reduced our own emissions by 64 percent since 2010, as we continue to work towards our net zero target by 2030. On every project, we work closely with our clients, consultants and supply chains to help them achieve their own low carbon goals.

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