Calculation of recycled plastic content in PET bottles

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EU extends authorisation of plastic recycling methods to include use in chemical recycling technologies, and introduces new rules to calculate recycled plastic content in single-use plastic bottles

Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2026/1425 of 30 June 2026 laying down rules for the application of Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the calculation, verification and reporting of data on recycled plastic content in single-use plastic beverage bottles and repealing Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2023/2683

Update

The European Union (EU) sets targets for EU Member States for the amount of recycled plastic content in polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles placed on the EU market. The targets are 25% recycled content from 2025, and 30% from 2030. The European Commission has now extended the methods authorised for use in plastic recycling to include chemical recycling technologies. The new Commission Decision also updates how Member States should calculate the recycled plastic content in PET bottles.

What is changing?

The Single-Use Plastics Directive 2019/904 sets targets for EU Member States for the amount of recycled plastic content in PET bottles placed on the EU market.

New rules on recycling technologies

This Decision extends the methods (e.g. shredding, melting) that previously applied only to mechanical recycling to other recycling technologies, especially chemical recycling. Recycled plastic can now also be produced from a mixture of pre- and post-consumer plastic waste.

Plastic waste from production or manufacturing waste, or that has been used as a source of energy for the recycling process (“fuel-use excluded”), is not considered “recycled plastic content” under this legislation.

Revised methodology for calculating recycled plastic content

Decision 2026/1425 updates the previous Decision (2023/2683) on how EU Member States should calculate, verify, and report on recycled plastic content.

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For each Member State, each year, the recycled plastic content of PET bottles is calculated as the percentage of recycled plastic in the total weight of the bottles' plastic parts placed on the market in that country. Only the plastic parts of a bottle are taken into account (e.g. the cap, lid, labels, and sleeves). Where the non-plastic parts are less than 5% of the bottle weight (e.g. a paper label), they are not subtracted from the total weight of the bottle.

The new methodology makes a distinction between plastic waste that is generated before it reaches the consumer ("pre-consumer waste") and the waste generated after the product has been sold to the consumer ("post-consumer waste"). Post-consumer waste also includes products that did not actually reach the consumer because the products have passed their expiry date. Only recycled plastic content that comes from post-consumer plastic waste is taken into account in the calculation of recycled content. Where recycled plastic is made from a mix of pre-consumer and post-consumer waste, only the post-consumer share may be counted ("mass balance accounting").

Recycled plastic from non-EU countries

From **21 November 2027**, recycled plastic from a non-EU country may only count towards the EU recycled PET bottles targets if an agreement between that country and the EU recognises that post-consumer plastic waste has been managed under environmental and human health standards equivalent to those of the EU.

Alternatively, for countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), recycled plastic from outside the EU may also count towards the EU's mandatory recycled content targets for PET bottles from 21 November 2027, provided the exporting country demonstrates that the waste has been managed in an environmentally sound manner in accordance with OECD requirements (OECD 2025). Non-EU countries must take into account requirements set by the Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC and the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation 2025/40.

Recycled plastic from non-EU countries that are not part of the OECD will not count towards the recycled PET bottles targets. However, as of July 2026, PET bottles from non-EU countries may still be placed on the EU market as not all PET bottles must be made from recycled plastic (only 25% recycled content from 2025, and 30% from 2030).

Why?

The Single-Use Plastics Directive 2019/904 requires each EU Member State to ensure that PET bottles of less than 3 litres are made with the following minimum recycled plastic content:

- 25% from 2025
- 30% from 2030.

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These targets are calculated as an average for all PET bottles placed on the market in each Member State.

They apply to PET bottles, including their caps and lids, but not to glass or metal beverage bottles with plastic caps and lids, or bottles used for medical purposes.

The European Commission is gradually setting rules to achieve these targets, including the methodologies to be used for calculation, verification, and reporting. By authorising chemically recycled content in new PET bottles (in addition to the currently authorised mechanical recycling), the EU expects to boost chemical recycling and thus help operators meet the targets for recycled content set by the Single-Use Plastics Directive.

Timeline

The new rules apply from **23 July 2026**.

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

- Operators that recycle plastic to be incorporated into PET bottles will have to request third-party verification of the most complex stages of the recycling process every year (every 3 years for small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs).
- EU operators will be responsible for checking their business partners' declarations regarding recycled content.
- EU national authorities (Member States) will conduct controls of the percentage of recycled plastic provided in the declaration of compliance.
- Additional requirements will apply to manufacturers of plastic bottles, particularly regarding third-party verification and traceability of recycled content.

Recommended Actions

Non-EU countries should start to align with EU standards for human health and environmental protection, especially the requirements set by the Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC and the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation 2025/40.

Non-EU operators must:

- provide a declaration stating the recycled plastic content of PET bottles with each batch of material exported to EU customers, using the template in Annex V of Decision 2026/1425

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- keep declarations concerning recycled plastic content for at least 5 years
- pass the declarations received from their suppliers along the supply chain to their customers in the EU (see Plastic food contact materials: good manufacturing practice).

If PET bottles (including final products) sold in the EU have been manufactured outside the EU, EU importers and EU Member State competent authorities should verify the accuracy of the information that accompanies the material.

From 21 May 2029 onwards, non-OECD countries will be able to submit a request to receive plastic waste from the EU for recycling.

Background

The objectives to reduce plastic waste generation and encourage reuse align with the European Chemicals Industry Action Plan (European Commission 2025a) which aims to strengthen the competitiveness and modernisation of the EU chemical sector. The European Commission (2025b) also proposes to simplify existing rules to reduce compliance costs and administrative burdens for the chemical industry.

While mechanical plastic recycling is usually preferred, the high food safety standards required by food (and beverage) plastic packaging can be better achieved through chemical recycling, despite the higher energy requirement.

This calculation methodology will serve as a model for future rules on recycled content in other sectors (see Review of packaging and packaging waste rules).

Resources

European Commission (2025a) A European Chemicals Industry Action Plan

European Commission (2025b) Proposal for a Regulation amending Regulations (EC) No 1272/2008, (EC) No 1223/2009 and (EU) 2019/1009 as regards simplification of certain requirements and procedures for chemical products

Decision 2023/2683 laying down rules for the application of Directive 2019/904 as regards the calculation, verification and reporting of data on recycled plastic content in single-use plastic beverage bottles

Directive 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment (Single-Use Plastics Directive)

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OECD (2025) Decision of the Council on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Wastes Destined for Recovery Operations, OECD/LEGAL/0266. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Sources

Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2026/1425 as regards the calculation, verification and reporting of data on recycled plastic content in single-use plastic beverage bottles

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