Plastic food contact materials: basic rules

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EU sets rules for all plastic recycling technologies and processes to produce safe food packaging

Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/1616 of 15 September 2022 on recycled plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with foods, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 282/2008

Commission Regulation (EU) 2025/2269 of 12 November 2025 correcting Regulation (EU) 2022/1616 as regards labelling of recycled plastic, the development of recycling technologies and the transfer of authorisations

Update

In 2022, the European Union (EU) introduced new rules on recycled plastic materials that are intended to come into contact with foods. These rules have applied since October 2022, and also affect non-EU products exported to the EU. Recycling installations, facilities, and companies must be included in the relevant EU register for authorised operators for recycling food contact materials.

Regulation 2025/2269 corrects some errors and clarifies some wording in these basic rules.

These rules for recycled plastic food contact materials are complemented by regulations on good manufacturing practices regarding quality control and manufacturing of (recycled) plastic food contact materials (see Plastic food contact materials: good manufacturing practice).

Impacted products

Food contact materials

What is changing?

Regulation 2022/1616 sets new rules for the decontamination of recycled plastic used in materials that are intended to come into contact with foods (food contact materials). It replaces previous rules on recycling processes (Regulation 282/2008).

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Scope

Regulation 2022/1616 extends the rules to cover all recycling processes, laying down requirements for:

- all plastic materials and articles containing recycled plastic that come into contact with food
- the development and operation of recycling processes that produce plastic
- how these recycled materials and articles are used in contact with food.

Objectives

These rules aim to ensure that:

- recycled plastic is safe for food contact
- all plastic is decontaminated during recycling
- all recycling processes are regulated.

Who can manufacture recycled plastics intended for contact with food?

Regulation 2022/1616 set up an EU register providing a comprehensive overview of recyclers, recycling processes, recycling installations, the facilities where these installations are located, recycling schemes, and novel technologies. Non-EU recycling operators selling recycled plastic materials in the EU must be listed in this register. Businesses (recyclers, recycling installations, etc.) that want to be registered have to complete an online Recycling Registration form (see "Implications" below).

The list of registered operators can be accessed using the Food and Feed Information Portal. This register helps competent authorities to control the quality of recycled plastic.

Food operators using recycled plastics will need to provide relevant registration numbers, e.g. for the installation used to manufacture a batch of recycled plastic.

Obligations on food business operators

Food business operators may only use recycled plastics that come into contact with food if they have been manufactured by registered facilities in accordance with the requirements set out in Regulation 2022/1616. Suppliers of recycled plastic materials must provide a declaration of compliance, according to a template set out in Annex III of the Regulation.

The use of certain recycled plastic materials may be restricted (Annex I). Food business operators must use recycled plastic materials in accordance with the instructions for use, and communicate any relevant instructions to other operators or end consumers (Art. 8).

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Why?

Regulation 2022/1616 introduces new basic rules for food contact materials from recycled plastic, because a number of problems were identified with the previous rules.

- Regulations 282/2008 and 10/2011 did not apply to all recycling technologies and recycled plastic materials, leaving a gap which created a potential risk to human health.
- Regulation 282/2008 excluded chemical depolymerisation, the use of offcuts and scraps, and the use of barrier layers. Although the safety of these technologies fell under Regulation 10/2011 on plastic materials, the risk assessment under that regulation was not sufficient.

Regulation 10/2011 requires that substances used to manufacture plastic materials are of a suitable purity and that any remaining impurities can be risk assessed. However, certain recycling technologies generate substances in an intermediate recycling stage with incidental contamination that is difficult to determine in final plastic materials, again leaving a gap that created a potential risk to human health.

Regulation 2022/1616 included some drafting mistakes (e.g. missing or incorrect cross-references), which have been corrected by Regulation 2025/2269. This latest Regulation also clarifies the wording of some requirements.

Timeline

The new rules for all plastic recycling technologies and processes have applied since **10 October 2022**.

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

For prepacked food products using recycled plastics, the rules for those selling the products in the EU also apply to exporters. A recycling installation located outside the EU must be on the EU register and must fully comply with the new Regulation if its recycled plastic is used on food products placed on the EU market.

In this case, non-EU recycling operators must register by filling in an online Recycling Registration form.

For more information on the registration forms and process, see the European Commission's Plastic Recycling webpage, which also gives examples of completed forms:

- Recycling Installation Number (RIN)
- Recycling Facility Number (RFN)

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- Recycling Operator Number (RON)
- Recycling Scheme Number (RSN).

The list of registered operators can be accessed via the Food and Feed Information Portal.

Non-EU countries must appoint a national contact point that will contribute to ensuring compliance with the EU rules. These are listed at: Contact points for the competent authorities outside the EU. Questions can be emailed to SANTE-FCM-RECYCLING-REGISTER@ec.europa.eu.

Recommended Actions

Suppliers of prepacked food to the EU market must ensure that any recycled plastic materials coming into contact with food are produced by recycling facilities that are registered with the EU and have provided the necessary declaration of compliance. This can be checked on the EU Register of Recycling facilities.

Background

The first circular economy action plan in 2015 identified the need to increase plastic recycling, which led to the adoption of a European strategy for plastics in 2018 (European Commission 2020). This strategy aims to increase plastic recycling and the recycled content of plastic products and packaging. Food packaging represents a significant proportion of all packaging materials.

Even where recycled plastic materials originate from food use, there may be incidental contamination. In particular, as the input to the recycling process comes from waste, there is an increased risk of microbiological contamination. Plastic should always be decontaminated during recycling to ensure that any remaining contaminants cannot endanger human health or affect the food with which the plastic comes into contact. Decontamination can take place at waste management or recycling facilities.

Resources

European Commission (2020) First circular economy action plan

European Commission (2022) Plastic Recycling: Questions and Answers

Regulation (EC) No 282/2008 on recycled plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with foods

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Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004 on materials and articles intended to come into contact with food

Sources

Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/1616 on recycled plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with foods

Commission Regulation (EU) 2025/2269 as regards labelling of recycled plastic, the development of recycling technologies and the transfer of authorisations

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