

# UNILEVER

When Unilever's new OMO Eco Active hit the supermarket shelves in Australia in May 2018, it wasn't just the plant-based cleaning agents that set it apart. Something else had changed. As the first of the Unilever's high-volume consumer brands packaged using Australian sourced recycled post-consumer plastics, the new addition to the OMO range was a sign of things to come.

By 2020, Unilever aims to be selling a selection of its most popular locally produced home and personal care products – including brands like Dove, OMO, Surf, Sunsilk and TRESemmé – in bottles containing at least 25% recycled high-density polyethylene (rHDPE). That's equivalent to tipping some 200,000 yellow bins full of used plastic containers back into the production chain, creating a new life for 750 tonnes of recycled plastics a year. It's one step in the brand's commitment to use at least 25% recycled plastic packaging by 2025, and will them become the first major consumer goods company in Australia to make the shift to source high volumes of locally recycled High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) plastic across home and personal care brands

Unilever views the innovation as a milestone moment for Australia's waste management industry and a significant step forward in accelerating Australia's circular economy by creating local demand for rigid plastic (such as shampoo and laundry detergent bottles) recycled through local council yellow kerbside collection bins.

## Leading through labelling

Unilever joined the Packaging Recycling Label Program as a founding member in January 2018. As part of the scheme the organisation regularly reviews its packaging recyclability through the Packaging Recyclability Evaluation Portal (PREP) and has adopted the Australasian Recycling Label (ARL) across a range of products sold throughout Australia and New Zealand.

It's an important tool for driving change, that clearly directs consumers to the right waste and recycling stream for every piece of packaging. This in turn can help reduce the contamination in our waste stream and provide a clean stream of post-consumer recycled content.

The extension of APCO's labelling program to include recycled content, reuse and compostable packaging will be a valuable asset.



## Building Australia's circular economy

Unilever's use of recycled content is also an important step in accelerating the organisation's and the broader Australian transition to a circular economy model, says David Jones, R&D Lead for Home, Beauty & Personal Care ANZ at Unilever.

It's an approach Unilever is adopting, both locally and at a global level.

'We are acutely aware of the consequences of a linear take-make-dispose model and we want to change it. It is clear urgent action is needed on multiple fronts,' says Mr Jones.

'We need a complete shift in how we think about and use resources. The business case is clear - reducing waste creates efficiencies and lowers costs.'

'Creating a local market and demand for recycled plastics is key to the long-term success, and this means help from all players – suppliers, packaging converters, brand owners, policymakers, and retailers, collectors, sorters and recyclers.'

'We are proud of the steps we are taking, but no business can create a circular economy in isolation.'

**Addressing plastic**

Unilever has singled out plastic packaging as a key business risk in its 2018 Annual Report. It concluded that reducing the volume of plastic within its own packaging and supply chain and increasing its use of recycled plastics was 'critical' to its future success.

'We have adopted an internal framework that is guiding our thinking and future innovation: less plastic, better plastic and no plastic' said Mr Jones.

The framework defines how Unilever is approaching product design, which is already driving innovation within the company, and the results are clear to see.

'The framework helped to inform our landmark move to introduce at least 25% Australian sourced post-consumer recycled plastic for some of our locally made and leading home and personal care brands.'

**Designing out waste**

In 2010, Unilever set its global operations, across 190 countries, the ambitious goal of halving the waste associated with all its products by 2020.

Better design is one important tool in this process. The redesign of Lipton's Ice Tea bottle, for example, delivered a slimmer spout and lid, reducing the volume of plastic per bottle by about 20%. That translates to some 93 tonnes less of new plastic a year in the Australian and New Zealand markets. For Lipton tea bags, simply removing foil wrapping and the paperboard trays inside the boxes cut packaging by 32% for 50 bag boxes and 35% for 100 tea bag packs.

Likewise, Sunsilk Shampoo and Conditioner bottles have been made with 29% less plastic. Across all of Unilever's products, 'light-weighting' has achieved a 15% reduction in the weight of packaging worldwide, reducing demand for raw materials, reducing transport costs and saving energy.

With a commitment to delivering 100% reusable, recyclable or compostable packaging by 2025, Unilever is on track to meet the 2025 National Packaging Targets.



**Embracing innovation**

Unilever's commitment to research and development is also delivering new solutions to industry-wide recyclability challenges.

Until now, black plastic bottles have been impossible to mechanically detect and sort for recycling. In 2019 Unilever became an early adopter in the development of a new detectable black pigment for High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) bottles – used for the TRESemmé

and Lynx (Axe) brands – enabling the materials to now be 'seen' by recycling plant scanners and sorted for recycling.

Another major global plastics challenge lies in laminated sachets that are small and currently not accepted by recyclers. Yet in many markets the availability of small volumes of personal and home care products is important, to ensure the lowest income earners can purchase them at affordable prices. Sachets are also useful for providing single serves in multipacks, thereby reducing food wastage.

Working in Indonesia, Unilever is developing a technical solution through its CreaSolv® technology. With the Indonesia plant now fully operational, Unilever plans to make the technology open source, so that companies in all markets, including Australia, can use it to solve the challenge of plastic sachets for the first time.

Around the world, Unilever is also working to extend the applications of recycled PET – the most readily recycled plastic used for products like soft drink bottles. In partnership with the world's biggest producer of PET resin, Indorama Ventures and the start-up, Ionika, Unilever is seeking to develop a new technology that can convert PET waste back into virgin grade PET suitable for use in food packaging, overcoming one of the major barriers to the use of recycled PET in packaging.

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