

Coca-Cola doubles down on single-use plastic in wake of stalled plastic treaty negotiations

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The Coca-Cola Company, a prominent member of the Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty, recently announced a shift in its sustainability goals regarding packaging and plastic use. The company is now aiming to increase the utilisation of recycled plastic to between 30 per cent and 35 per cent globally by 2035 and to facilitate the collection of 70 per cent to 75 per cent of the equivalent number of bottles and cans introduced into the market each year. However, this new direction effectively ends its previous commitments to enhance reusable packaging and decrease the use of virgin plastic.

Notably, Coca-Cola has discontinued the following goals, which were reported in the company's 2023 Environmental Update in August:

1. To have at least 25 per cent of its beverages sold worldwide by volume in refillable or returnable glass or plastic bottles, or in fountain dispensers using reusable packaging by 2030.

2. To reduce its use of virgin plastic derived from non-renewable sources by a cumulative 3 million metric tons from 2020 to 2025.

In response to this announcement, Oceana released a statement from Matt Littlejohn, Senior Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, criticising Coca-Cola's decision. He stated:

“Coca-Cola’s choice to focus on single-use plastic by abandoning its goals to reduce virgin plastic and increase reusable packaging is short-sighted, irresponsible, and deserves widespread condemnation from customers, employees, investors, and governments concerned about the effects of plastics on our oceans and health.”

Littlejohn further emphasised the potential consequences of Coca-Cola's new policy, stating that it will likely lead to billions more single-use plastic bottles and cups entering our waterways and oceans. Oceana estimates that if Coca-Cola were to meet its goal of achieving 25 per cent reusable packaging by 2030 (up from its current share of 14 per cent), the company could prevent the production of over 100 billion 500ml single-use plastic bottles and cups, thereby stopping approximately 8.5 to 14.7 billion plastic bottles and cups from reaching our seas and waterways.