

RSPCA Assured Plastics & Packaging Policy

Version 2

Published 03/07/2020



CERTIFICATION MARK

Plastics and packaging

Summary

As part of the largest animal welfare organisation in the UK, RSPCA Assured has an obligation to assure the welfare of animals wherever it is practical to do so; and not just those covered by its farm animal welfare certification scheme, but any animals which may be impacted by its actions.

Although we don't fully understand the long-term impact of plastic on wildlife, the immediate impact is clear. The bodies of gulls, fish, whales and other marine wildlife are frequently found with large quantities of plastic in their guts, as they mistake the rubbish for food. On-land, wild animals are also regularly injured by plastic litter; the RSPCA receives over 7,000 calls a year about litter incidents.

Plastic food packaging is an enormous contributor to these issues and figures show that if current trends continue, plastic may outweigh the volume of fish in our oceans by 2050*.

Many products carrying the RSPCA Assured certification mark are currently packaged in plastic. Plastics can have an important role to play in protecting food and consequently ensuring food safety for consumers. It also helps to reduce food waste by extending the shelf life of perishable products. However, it's important that we strive to only use the *right* plastics and to do so in a sensible and sustainable way.

Following the guidance of WRAP's initiative, The UK Plastics Pact (which all major retailers and several producers are signed up to**), RSPCA Assured will set out guidelines on its approach to plastic packaging with regards to products featuring the certification mark.

*World Economic Forum

**RSPCA Assured members and associated brands currently signed up include; Aldi, Asda, Lidl, M&S, Morrisons, Ocado, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose and Cranswick)

Purpose of the plastics and packaging policy

Many retailers and food producers are already signed up to The UK Plastics Pact, with emphasis on their own-brand products. However, we feel it is important to specifically outline our preferred approach for all brands that may use the RSPCA Assured certification mark on

their products, in order to minimise the negative effect that this packaging might have on wildlife and the environment.

What this policy covers:

1. Elimination of problematic or unnecessary single-use plastic packaging for RSPCA Assured products
2. Adoption of reusable or recyclable materials in packaging
3. Proactive promotion of effectively recycling, composting, or repurposing of packaging
4. Increase in use of recycled content in all plastic packaging carrying the RSPCA Assured certification mark

1. Elimination of problematic or unnecessary single-use plastic

Most plastics don't completely decompose, meaning their presence in the environment can be felt long after their purpose is filled. If product and pack functionality can be optimally achieved without plastic, such as egg boxes or glass milk bottles, we don't want to see them in use. And if packaging can be adapted to remove unnecessary and problematic plastics, all the better.

Non NIR detectable coloured plastic, PVC, polystyrene and unrecyclable laminated card are amongst the most 'problematic materials', according to WRAP. Coloured plastic (particularly black), though sometimes preferred as a stylish packaging solution, is especially difficult as near infrared (NIR) sensors at recycling plants can't currently identify it as recyclable, so it often ends up in land-fill.

As of 01 January 2020, we request that no **new** products are packaged in these materials. And as of 01 January 2021, we will no longer permit the use of these materials (non-NIR detectable coloured plastic, PVC or polystyrene) in the packaging of any existing **products that carry the RSPCA Assured label**. We will, however, allow a two-year window (expiring on December 31st 2022) for existing stocks of packaging and labels to be used up.

2. Adoption of reusable or recyclable materials

Instead of problematic plastics, we would like to see the adoption of more sustainable materials, including reusable packaging, and more easily recyclable materials. We recommend packaging be designed with end of life in mind.

3. Promotion of effective recycling, composting or repurposing

Clear instructions should be included on packaging on how to recycle, compost (for suitable packaging such as egg boxes) or repurpose packaging, to make this process as easy as possible for the consumer. We recommend that this be communicated via the On-Pack Recycling Label scheme (visit OPRL.org.uk for more information).

4. Increase in recycled content in plastic packaging

In addition to reducing plastic in packaging, for those products which still require plastics, we would encourage the use of recycled materials where possible within the limitations of food safety and industry infrastructure.

Why change?

Most companies are already making changes to their supply chains and considering the role that plastic has in their business. For RSPCA Assured, protecting our environment, and the animals in it is crucial to our mission. In the future, we also hope to recognise members who make significant strides in this area.

This issue is gathering traction in the media, amongst pressure groups and with the general public more broadly. As one of the leading ethical assurance labels, we believe it is imperative to put policies in place to protect and fortify the reputation of the scheme, our partners and our members.