

Voluntary schemes still key to cup recycling success

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Following the delay to the plan to introduce a 25p charge on single-use drinks cups in Scotland, [the National Cup Recycling Scheme](#) (NCRS) has reaffirmed its commitment to innovative voluntary schemes.

Hannah Osman, manager of the voluntary scheme, which is administered by Valpak, said: “While we understand that policy development takes time and must reflect wider environmental and economic considerations, we continue to emphasise the importance of tackling cup waste at scale. Incentives and charges can both play a role in influencing behaviour, but whatever the mechanism, we need continued focus and collaboration to make cup recycling the norm.

“The majority of fibre-composite cups are made from high-quality fibre which can be recycled multiple times into new products, but we need to provide suitable cup recycling infrastructure and encourage behaviour change. We urge businesses, consumers, and local authorities to keep progressing with efforts to reduce, reuse, and recycle cups, regardless of legislative timelines.”

The National Cup Recycling Scheme was launched in 2018 to boost UK paper cup recycling and has since facilitated the recycling of 217 million cups. It unites major retailers, including Caffè Nero, Costa Coffee, Greggs, McDonald’s, Pret A Manger, Lavazza Professional and Burger King, to fund the collection and recycling of paper cups. Last month, the scheme and its members teamed up with Keep Wales Tidy and innovative waste sorting app Bower, to create the world’s first screening for cups. The trial uses pioneering AI technology to reward customers in Cardiff for recycling at stores.

According to the government, over 380 million single use cups are used in Scotland every year – equivalent to 71 cups per person. Valpak analysis for WRAP* shows that the UK has the capacity to

recycle all of the paper cups placed on the market.

The charge of 25p per cup was included in legislation already passed by Holyrood and originally planned for the end of 2025. However, it was omitted from the Scottish Government's annual plan. The Single-use Cup Charge Advisory Group is now expected to meet in early June to discuss the findings from the consultation on the charge.

*In 2021, Valpak was commissioned by WRAP to report on the market situation for fibre-composite cups. *[Single-use Cups and On-the-Go Fibre-composite Food Packaging](#)* found that the UK has capacity to recycle all of the paper cups placed on the market.

<https://www.cuprecyclingscheme.co.uk>