

# Guidance On plastic straws in pubs

## Our position

The BBPA is urging members to end the use of plastic straws and consider environmentally-friendly alternatives. BBPA and members are fully committed to reducing the use of plastic and plastic waste and companies are looking to supply straws in pubs only when asked. We are also working with the British Institute of Innkeeping and others to look at biodegradable alternatives and the composting and recycling. The BBPA/SBPA is urging members to end the use of plastic straws and consider environmentally-friendly alternatives.

## Introduction

The British Beer & Pub Association (BBPA) is the leading organisation representing the brewing and pub sector. Our members account for some 90 per cent of beer brewed in Britain today, and own around 20,000 of the nation's pubs. A full list of our members can be found [here](#).

The BBPA and its members are working continuously to promote responsibility throughout the sector. Over recent months, environmental responsibility in particular has been a crucial part of the work undertaken by the beer and pub sector. Our sector already works hard to promote reuse and recycling. For example, casks and kegs containing draught beer are reused numerous times and can last up to 30 years before being recycled. The BBPA and members work hard to promote recycling and responsibility; our unique not-for-profit packaging waste compliance scheme (Sustain), is freely available to our members.

We acknowledge however, that more needs to be done to promote environmental responsibility, both in our sector and society as a whole. Like most businesses, brewers and pub operators make use of plastic packaging materials, although only 0.1% of UK beer sales are in plastic bottles.<sup>1</sup> In recent months plastic waste has been the focus of much political

debate with plastic straws at the forefront. As one of the top 10 items found on beach clean-ups every year<sup>2</sup>, significantly reducing the use of plastic straws is vital to protect our marine wildlife. Consequently, the BBPA and member companies have been working to support this agenda and associated campaigns. We hope to see pubs at the forefront of this to promote environmental responsibility.

In supporting these campaigns and reducing the use of plastic straws, there is a number of elements for pub operators and licensees to consider. Primarily, the use of straws in pubs and bars is an important part of drinking culture in the UK. They are also useful and sometimes essential for the young and some less physically able customers. The UK uses 8.5 billion single-use plastic straws every year; the highest number in Europe.

Finding an alternative is therefore important for consumers, but may also present a number of challenges. We are seeking to provide here brief guidance for companies and licensees to help them reduce significantly the use of plastic straws and move to alternative materials. It highlights some of the benefits and challenges of each material type. The paper focuses on paper, wheat, metal/glass reusable and biodegradable plastic straws which covers some of the most commonly used plastic straw alternatives.

## Important things to note

- Whilst most plastic straw alternatives are more expensive, only offering straws on request will help to offset this price.
- Both the UK and Scottish Government have indicated that they may consider banning the use of single-use plastic straws, with a consultation on banning plastic straws set to begin in late 2018.
- Countries across the world are seeing consumer demand to ban plastic straws.

<sup>1</sup> BBPA Statistical Handbook 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics from the Marine Conservation Society. See: 'Plastic straws could be banned, suggests Michael Gove'.

*BBC News*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43169004>

- The UK uses 8.5 billion single-use plastic straws every year.
- Products sourced from outside of the UK/EU should be also be checked to ensure that they comply with all relevant hygiene and food safety requirements. When sourcing from abroad, there is also a carbon footprint consideration.

### Food Safety/Food Hygiene Compliance

Whether reusable or non-reusable, all alternatives for plastic drinking straws will need to be made from food grade materials. In addition, such materials should not impact on the flavour, aroma and/or expected characteristics of the product.

In the case of reusable straws, consideration must be given to ensuring that these are cleaned correctly prior to re-use and to ensure that there is no impact either on consumer safety or product quality. Straws should be rinsed thoroughly following use and prior to cleaning in a dishwasher using an appropriate detergent/sanitiser. Initial cleaning may require an immersion soak/rinse or use of pipe-cleaners or brushes. Straws used for drinks containing solid fruit pieces or pulp or which are viscous or contain a greater concentration of sugar may require a longer rinse to ensure residues are removed.

### Paper straws

Paper straws are typically more eco-friendly than plastic straws, are biodegradable and are easy to source. Paper straws are more expensive than plastic straws. Offering straws however, only on request to customers will help overcome the increase in price.

It is also important to ensure that the source of material is sustainable. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) for example, promotes the responsible management of forests on an international scale.

### Wheat straws

Wheat straws are a good alternative to plastic straws, made from 100% wheat can biodegrade and decompose with ease. Wheat straws do not go soggy when in contact with liquids for long periods of time, a

problem which is often highlighted by consumers when considering paper and card straws.

### Biodegradable straws

Biodegradable plastic is now increasingly common. Under the correct conditions, where materials have enough warmth, oxygen, microbes and moisture, biodegradable plastics can successfully decompose in under 12 weeks. Companies need to be aware however, that there are a number of controversies surround their usage.

Whilst biodegradable straws remove plastic straws from the waste stream, a number of things need to be considered:

- Biodegradable plastics require highly specific environmental conditions – warmth, oxygen, microbes and moisture. If biodegradable straws are disposed of into landfill sites, instead of commercial food waste services, this material will not properly biodegrade, and studies show that instead they emit high levels of methane.
- If corn-based packaging made with polylactic acid (Pla) is recycled alongside normal plastic recycling, this will contaminate the waste stream, making plastics no longer recyclable.
- Bioplastics compete for land with biofuels and food crops. Food shortages already exist in other countries due to competition for farmland.
- Recycling companies in the UK would have to invest heavily to support the increase of bioplastics into the waste stream and ensure they do not contaminate regular plastic recycling.
- Some plant-based disposable straws are designed for commercial composting and will not break down in a marine environment. Such straws must be disposed of properly, but this could be challenging to manage in a busy pub environment.
- Many biodegradable options do not necessarily cause these issues however. Simply checking the companies' policy on biodegradable products will highlight their environmental standards. The locality of nearby commercial composting sites and collection options also need consideration.

### **Reusable metal/glass straws**

Whilst purchasing metal or glass straws may be a more expensive alternative, these straws can be reused and cleaned in the dishwasher. The ability to continuously reuse these straws could save money for pubs in the long run.

Glass straws should be checked regularly for damage. Particularly in the case of clear glass, where any fragments present in the drink as a result of damage to the straw may be difficult to see and may then present a cut or choking hazard.

*For further information and for details of some companies that offer alternative options, please contact Philippa Borrowman ([pborrowman@beerandpub.com](mailto:pborrowman@beerandpub.com)).*

*For additional information on actions being taken by individual BBPA member companies, please also contact Philippa.*

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