

Recycle it Right

British Glass

If you would like any further information,
please contact Phillip Fenton at
p.fenton@britglass.co.uk



British Glass

Recyclability of glass

Glass is one of the most sustainable materials on earth. It is 100% recyclable and can be re-melted endlessly without ever reducing its quality. Making new glass from recycled glass reduces CO₂ emissions and energy use, saving 580kg of carbon dioxide emissions with every tonne of glass re-melted. That's why British Glass are working with companies at every point in the life cycle of glass products to increase recycling.

The UK's glass sector has an excellent, and improving, recycling record at 68.8% of all glass bottles and jars placed on the market – one of the highest recycling rates of any packaging material. As the representative body for the UK glass industry, British Glass works hard with our members to increase glass recycling and to deliver a truly circular economy.

One of our goals is to maximise the quantity and quality of recycled glass (cullet). Demand by glass manufacturers for good quality cullet is always high: the industry and its wider supply chain rely upon a consistent supply of good quality, economically sourced, post-consumer glass to maximise the recycled content of new glass bottles and jars. In fact, producing glass packaging from cullet is more cost effective for manufacturers than using raw materials, as such high collection and recycling rates are both economically and resource efficient for the glass industry.

The UK glass sector has an excellent recycling record of 68.8%, but we know there is more to do. That is why we have set out our ambition to achieve a 90% collection rate by 2030.

The Issues

- A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) it is not the right solution for glass in the UK. As an industry we are committed to increasing the quantity and quality of recycled glass. Industry experts, trade bodies and consumers believe this is best achieved by increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the existing kerbside recycling and bottle bank systems.
- A DRS will collect glass beverage containers of predominantly green and brown glass, while the majority of clear glass food packaging will be collected through kerbside or bottle bank schemes. In the UK there is a glass colour imbalance which means the industry already has high levels of coloured glass going back into our bottles (up to 90% for green glass) but requires more clear glass; to improve the current recycling rate, it's important that we increase the proportion of clear glass packaging.
- It is deeply concerning that a DRS could actually have a detrimental impact on glass recycling, through crushing the glass in collection machines to a point where it cannot be colour sorted, and therefore cannot be remade into clear glass containers. Having two glass recycling systems puts at risk the future viability of kerbside collection of glass food packaging, such as jars, which represents about 30% of all glass packaging.

The Solution

We already have a system in place to deliver a high quantity and quality of recycled glass, and it is at our doorsteps. A new expanded Extended Producer Responsibility scheme can put in place the right measures to increase the quality and quantity of recycling for the long-term and create a truly circular economy.

What is Extended Producer Responsibility? We already have a system of producer responsibility in the UK where producers and retailers pay an amount for every tonne of packaging they put on the market which is used to support the collecting and reprocessing of materials. The UK Government are proposing to extend this so companies pay the full cost of recovering materials for recycling.

What does this mean in practice? EPR will ultimately lead to more investment in recycling infrastructure across the UK, both for products recycled at home and on-the-go. It will also promote better recycling through improved communications to ensure the glass industry achieves our ambition of a 90% glass collection rate for recycling by 2030.

Excluding glass from DRS will improve recycling

As the UK Government considers introducing a Deposit Return Scheme, British Glass believe that glass bottles should be excluded from the design of the scheme. While we do not oppose a targeted DRS scheme for lighter and unbreakable packaging materials, it is vital that glass collection remains at our kerbsides and bottle banks, where we already have an effective system that the public understands.

5 out of the top 7 European countries for glass recycling do not operate a DRS¹.

Including glass in DRS has negative consequences

It will increase the need for primary raw materials – glass is not recycled in the same way as other packaging materials. While industry has relatively high levels of re-melted glass in green and brown beverage bottles, we need more clear glass to meet demand for food jar and beverage bottle production. However, if glass is crushed which certain DRS systems do, then it cannot be re-melted back into clear glass containers, requiring producers to use primary raw materials instead of re-melted glass.

It will increase the carbon footprint of the glass industry – glass production actually uses far less CO₂ when re-melting recycled glass than by using raw materials; a saving of 580kg per tonne of re-melted glass. A DRS may achieve its aim of creating a circular economy with other packaging materials, but not with glass.

It will create consumer confusion – running two glass collection systems in parallel is more confusing for the public, and risks less glass being recycled as a result of a dual system. That's why consumers don't support DRS for glass – with over two thirds of the public wanting glass to remain part of household collections.

It will put at risk kerbside glass recycling – diverting 70% of all glass packaging away from kerbside through a DRS puts at risk the viability of continued kerbside and bottle bank collections of glass; in turn meaning 30% of glass food packaging, which is mainly clear glass, could potentially end up in landfill.

It would threaten jobs in the glass industry – a major concern about including glass in a DRS scheme is that it will encourage a switch from glass to plastic packaging (as seen in other countries), putting glass industry investment plans and jobs at risk.



¹ https://feve.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Recycling-DRS-in-Scotland_OHL-report_Final.pdf

There is a better solution for glass recycling

British Glass believe that the most effective route to increasing glass recycling is a combination of extended producer responsibility (EPR), communications, consistent local authority kerbside and bottle bank collections and increased recycling targets.

This approach would deliver an easy to understand, single glass collection system which would boost recycling figures by capturing all types of glass containers and all three glass colours in one stream, increase the quality of the recycled material, reduce the burden on consumers, and help create a truly circular economy. According to consumer research, 78% of households in England and Wales 'often or always' use kerbside collection to recycle their glass. When asked what would increase the recycling of glass, respondents cited more kerbside recycling of glass (73%) and more bottle banks (69%) as the first and second options for improving glass recycling; ahead of a DRS.

Case study: Wales

Wales has been consistently ahead of the rest of the UK when it comes to recycling rates, with the third highest household recycling rate in the world¹.

In Wales, the capture rate of glass collected in kerbside recycling is 87.3%, the highest of any widely recyclable material.

The Welsh Government has set a target for Wales to become a zero-waste nation by 2050. The example of Wales is proof that a national culture of recycling can lead to significant increases in recycling at the kerbside, which is achievable throughout the rest of the UK if the right model is adopted.

Recycling glass through a new EPR system will:



Increase the quantity of glass recycling



Ensure a single system for recovering glass, reducing confusion and maximising participation



Create a more circular economy than through a DRS



Further decarbonise the glass industry

#RecycleItRight

Improve household collections. **Increase** glass recycling. **Create** a truly circular economy.

² <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2019-12/consultation-document-circular-economy-strategy.pdf>