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Consumer Goods Giant Unilever Commits to 100% Recyclable Packaging

OAKLAND, CA – January 19, 2017 – Consumer goods giant Unilever has made a [commitment](#) that 100% of its packaging will be recyclable, reusable, or compostable by 2025. The company, the world’s third largest consumer goods company after Procter & Gamble and Nestle, said it will ensure “it is technically possible for its plastic packaging to be reused or recycled and there are established, proven examples of it being commercially viable for plastics re-processors to recycle the material.”

The shareholder advocacy organization *As You Sow* has been engaging the company for more than a year to make its packaging recyclable, focusing especially on multi-laminate plastic sachets and pouches used for shampoos in small packages marketed in Asia that cannot currently be recycled. Much of this packaging is discarded and ends up polluting waterways in developing Asian countries due to the lack of solid waste management systems.

“We are pleased that Unilever heard our concerns and those of other stakeholders and made a significant commitment to recyclable packaging,” said Conrad MacKerron, Senior Vice President of *As You Sow*. “We hope, however, that this timetable can be accelerated due to recent studies showing growing amounts of plastic waste ending up in oceans, where they harm marine life.” A scientific [study](#) released in 2015 estimated that 8 million tons of plastics are swept into waterways annually — equivalent to a garbage truck load every minute.

In the marine environment, plastics break down into indigestible particles that marine life mistake for food. Studies by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency suggest a synergistic effect between plastic debris and persistent, bio-accumulative, toxic chemicals. Plastics absorb toxics such as polychlorinated biphenyls and dioxins from water or sediment and transfer them to the marine food web and potentially to human diets. If no actions are taken, oceans are expected to contain more plastic than fish by 2050.

The company said it would work in partnership with governments and other stakeholders to support scaling up of collection and reprocessing infrastructure, which is critical in the transition towards a circular economy. *As You Sow* believes the keys to controlling ocean plastic deposition involve radically improving capabilities to increase capture and recycling through modernized systems and new recovery markets, as well as reducing the amount of single use plastics in commerce through alternative materials and materials redesign.

Unilever is the third large consumer goods company to make a significant commitment to recycling packaging following engagement with *As You Sow*. In 2014 [Procter & Gamble](#) agreed to make 90% of its packaging recyclable, and [Colgate-Palmolive](#) pledged to make all packaging recyclable in three of four operating divisions and to use 50% recycled content, both by 2020.

As You Sow’s [Waste program](#) advocates for more responsible production and recycling of consumer products and packaging to preserve the Earth’s limited natural resources. Packaging should be designed to be recycled, reducing the use of virgin natural resources and mitigating emissions that contribute to climate change. These resources should be generating profits and green jobs. Instead they play a role in poisoning the environment, contribute to ocean toxicity, and generate risk for the companies that produce them.



As You Sow (<http://www.asyousow.org>) promotes environmental and social corporate responsibility through shareholder advocacy, coalition building, and innovative legal strategies.