



Plastic packaging

- > Packaging made of plastic accounts for around 40% of the consumption of plastic in Switzerland.
- > The vast majority is properly disposed of after use. However, a small proportion ends up in the environment through littering, thereby causing pollution.
- > It is important to optimise packaging, use it with awareness and dispose of it correctly after use.

Package littering: a major source of plastics in the environment

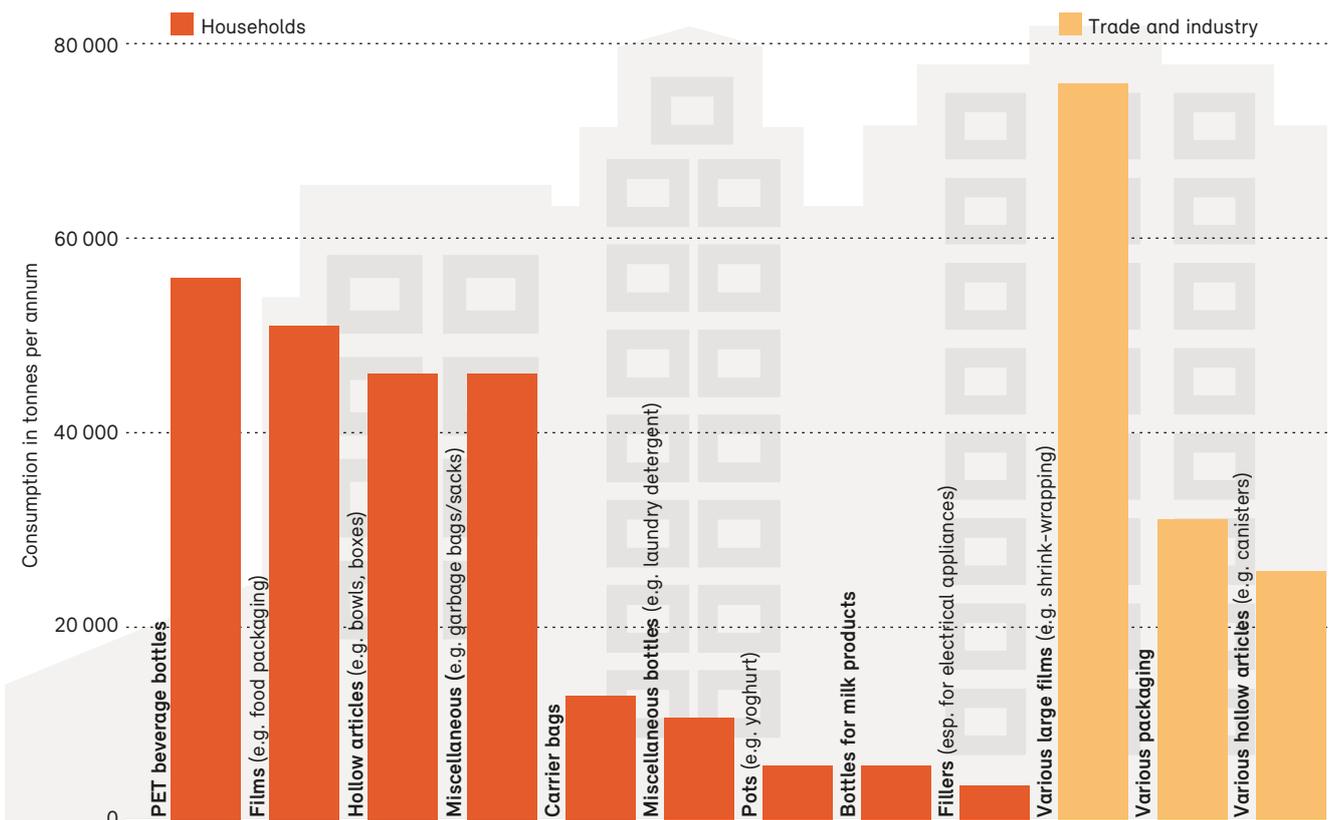
Littering – particularly of takeaway packaging – is responsible for the largest volume of plastics entering the environment in Switzerland. Public spaces are regularly cleaned in Switzerland and a large proportion of littered waste is therefore collected and disposed of in incinerators in an environmentally compatible way (see “Littering” factsheet). However, if plastics remain in the environment (e.g. on agricultural land), they only degrade

very slowly and pollute watercourses and soil in the form of macroplastics and microplastics.

Use of plastic packaging in Switzerland

Packaging performs a number of functions: it protects content, and protects users from the content, simplifies transport and storage and provides space for information and advertising. Plastic packaging accounts for a large share of Switzerland's consumption of plastic – around 40%¹.

Use of plastic packaging in households, trade and industry



Correct disposal is crucial

In Switzerland, most packaging is incinerated after use in incinerators with energy recovery.

A smaller proportion is collected and recycled separately. Recycling makes sense particularly where the reduction in environmental impact is greater than that achieved by disposing of this waste by incineration, and where it is economically viable. Collections that are sorted (collections of the same type of plastic), for example into PET beverage bottles and PE bottles with tops, produce high-quality, marketable recycled materials (recyclate). Plastic packaging from trade and industry is generally to

be found in sorted form and large volumes, and can also sometimes be recycled. Mixed collected plastics are separated in sorting plants. Only some of these sorted plastics are suitable for recycling, the remainder are incinerated. The recyclate from plastics which are sorted after collection is often of lower quality than that from sorted collections.

Advantages and disadvantages of different packaging materials

Alternative packaging materials or no packaging at all can be used instead of plastics. See the pros and cons of different packaging materials below.

MATERIAL	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	EXAMPLES
Plastic	Light, sometimes recyclable	Sometimes not recyclable (e.g. composite plastics)	Bottles
Glass	No limits to recyclability	Heavy material (e.g. more weight to transport)	Bottles
Aluminium	No limits to recyclability	Primary production leads to high environmental pollution	Drinks cans, tubes, bowls
Textiles	Durable	Primary production leads to high environmental pollution	Cotton bag
Paper/cardboard	Biodegrades in the environment, recyclable	Hard to recycle when a component of composite materials	Drinks cartons, paper bags for baked goods
No packaging	No packaging material needs to be produced or disposed of	Keeping qualities are reduced and hygiene, labelling and information are impossible	Packaging-free shops

Possible measures

- **Dispose of plastic waste properly:** recycle it in an environmentally friendly manner or incinerate it.
- **Give preference to environmentally friendly product designs,** e.g. reusable rather than single-use products.
- **Use no packaging where possible.**

¹ Redilo 2011: Projekt "Kunststoff-Verwertung Schweiz" Bericht Module 1 und 2 (in German)

Further information

- FOEN guide to waste on plastics
- FOEN information for specialists on littering (in German, French and Italian)
- Zero littering – a guide to a litter-free environment (brochure in German, French and Italian)