

Major brands, retailers are meeting plastic collection, recycling targets

Of the over 120,000 tonnes of plastic entering the South African market through Petco members in 2022, 69% has been collected for recycling. This is according to data released by producer responsibility organisation (PRO), Petco earlier this month. These results show that member brands and retailers are meeting the required collection and recycling targets.



Image source: mali maeder from [Pexels](#)

The audited data, released on 8 June 2023, represents 2022 collection and recycling rates for the products Petco's members have registered with the organisation, comprising mainly PET bottles, jars and their labels and closures.

These members include Pick n Pay, Woolworths, Unilever, Tiger Brands, Twizza, The Beverage Company, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, among others.

This comes one year after the promulgation of the Section 18 amendment to the National Environmental Management: Waste Act. Outlining now-mandatory extended producer responsibility (EPR), the regulations require packaging producers – brand owners, retailers and importers – to comply with stipulated annual targets for the improved design, collection and recycling of post-consumer product packaging in a bid to move the country towards a more circular economy.

Formed in 2004 as a then-voluntary PRO, Petco administers dedicated EPR schemes for a range of packaging materials on behalf of its members. It assists members with the sustainable design of product packaging, and supports the nationwide collection and recycling of PET bottles and their associated plastic closures and labels that end up in the same waste stream.

In 2022, Petco members placed 121,369 tonnes of packaging on the South African market, comprising mainly PET beverage bottles, home and personal care bottles, edible oil bottles, food bottles and jars, plus their associated labels and closures, as well as minor volumes of PET strapping, shrink sleeves and thermoforms.

Of this volume, 69%, or 83,967 tonnes of post-consumer packaging, was collected for recycling, with a total recycling rate of 66% achieved.

In addition, Petco's financial support for one of its contracted recycling partners facilitated the availability of 25,000 tonnes of food-grade recycled PET (rPET) for inclusion in new product packaging, helping the broader sector to meet its recycled content targets.

The data also reveals that Petco helped its members surpass Year 1 government targets for collecting:

- PET beverage bottles
- plastic PET oil bottles
- single-use PET products – covering home, food and personal care
- polyolefin rigids

While PROs struggled to come to grips with the Year 1 reporting requirements set by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Petco chief executive officer Cheri Scholtz said the organisation had used its 17 years of experience operating under a voluntary model to assist its members in transitioning to the mandatory EPR environment.

“The results we’ve achieved are due to the commitment of our members. We appreciate their partnership and inputs in navigating this new EPR space together.”

New declaration system

Scholtz said Petco had developed a new, more robust EPR declaration system to simplify the reporting process for members.

“In order to report more accurately on the various identified products for which we’ve enabled the collection, Petco undertook a bale characterisation study to better understand the typical composition of a PET bale which is purchased by our contracted recyclers.

“In combination, through our member declarations, regular recycler audits and bale sampling assessments, we are able to report with greater granularity. This assists us to meet our DFFE reporting requirements and shows our diverse membership how we are tracking their particular identified products,” said Scholtz.

LBP inclusion

This year, Petco also introduced an EPR scheme for liquid board packaging (LBP), which will be included in the reporting for Year 2.

“In offering an EPR scheme for LBP, we see immediate synergies for a number of our members that already sell products in both PET and LBP. We also know that the waste streams within which we work are not exclusive to PET and, as such,

expanding our focus to include LBP is relatively simple for our teams in the field.

“In Year 2, we will continue with our member engagement workshops and work closely with our members for higher impact.

“Petco remains committed to working with our members and all tiers of government to achieve EPR regulatory targets and to enable our members to meet their reporting requirements, both Section 18 EPR requirements and their own. We’ll continue to lead the implementation of EPR in South Africa,” said Scholtz.

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