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## Compostable coffee cups present solution to single-use cups in foodservice environments

London, Tuesday, 22 March – Compostable coffee cups present a sustainable solution to waste caused by takeaway drinks packaging in foodservice environments like office blocks, universities and hospitals, says the Bio-based and Biodegradable Industries Association (BBIA).

In an [article in \*The Times\*](#) yesterday (21 March), Viridor Chief Executive Ian MacAulay stated that due to the cost of recycling single-use disposable coffee cups, the best solution for them is to incinerate them to generate energy.

Traditional packaging materials, with composites such as paper and plastics in the same item, are indeed difficult to recycle. Most foodservice packaging in the UK goes to landfill or incineration as, when combined, the easily recycled materials of card and plastic contaminate one another, with food and drink residue adding to the mix.

Producers of these single-use cups are paying a tax to recycle these cups through packaging recovery notes (PRNs) but are not getting the recycling they are paying for, due to the process's current lack of cost-benefit to recyclers.

Compostable coffee cups and food service packaging, on the other hand, are available on the market in the UK and can be recycled back to the soil from which they came to create a circular recovery.

Compostable packaging is an extremely practical solution for closed environments like offices, catering, airports and closed events, where the waste stream can be most effectively controlled and the resulting waste directed to effective recovery via composting.

There are many examples of food service packaging made from compostable materials making a big difference, with the London 2012 Olympics and last year's Milan Expo showing that they can work on a large scale. At these events, using compostable packaging worked well to reduce residual waste generation.

**Eilidh Brunton, Group Recycling Consultant at BBIA member and eco-friendly packaging and catering disposables producer Vegware, said:**

“It's not just cups – recycling is a major challenge for all conventional foodservice disposables. Compostable packaging is the only solution to zero waste in foodservice. This is an existing and real solution, already in use in offices, universities and hospitals across the UK. One large Canary Wharf

office composts 2.3 tonnes of used compostable packaging each month; [Cambridge University diverts 1.5 tonnes a month to a local composter](#).

“Starting up just eight years ago, Vegware now holds around two per cent of the UK’s foodservice catering disposables market, illustrating the appetite for our sustainable packaging and practical waste support. In response to huge demand following the media attention, we will now be setting up new trade waste routes all around the UK for compostable packaging and food waste.”

**Andy Sweetman, Chairman of BBIA, said:**

“At the present time, compostable products do not claim to present an immediate solution to the issue of high street retail, as it cannot be ensured that they will enter the food waste stream. To get compostable materials to soil the UK needs good, ubiquitous food waste collection systems to be put in place. This will ensure that the compostable materials help to facilitate the wider collection of organic waste and are not sent to traditional plastics recycling.

“However the growing success of compostable foodservice packaging being effectively recovered in closed-loop settings provides a real beacon for how the recovery system can be developed on a wider scale too.”

## Notes for editors

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### BBIA

The Bio-based and Biodegradable Industries Association (BBIA) is the trade body created to strengthen the voice of the circular bioeconomy sector in the UK. It was launched in 2015.

BBIA’s mission is to unite those working in the biodegradable and bio-based industries and to develop partnerships with those who share our vision: to put the bioeconomy agenda at the centre of the political debate on sustainability and economic growth in the UK.

To open up opportunities and standards in the emerging green economy market, BBIA will work with companies and organisations involved in the production of bio-based and biodegradable chemicals and polymers for the benefit of the environment.

More information is available at: <http://bbia.org.uk/>

### Vegware

Vegware makes compostable catering disposables from renewable plant materials. The company’s packaging is designed for food waste recycling, and it works closely with the waste sector to help clients go zero waste.

There are other benefits to renewable materials, aside from the zero waste opportunities. Vegware's plant-based materials are renewable and low-carbon, unlike the finite fossil materials in conventional packaging. According to the company's Eco Audits, Vegware's UK customers together made these environmental savings in 2015:

- Saved 3,500 tonnes of carbon – (like cancelling the carbon from 6,093 flights from London to New York)
- Used 1,200 tonnes of recycled content
- Used 2,700 tonnes of renewable plant materials – not plastic

A case study for Vegware's work with Cambridge University is available at: <https://vimeo.com/vegware/cambridgeuni>.

### **Coffee cup waste in the news**

A selection of news stories in the national media on waste from single-use coffee cups from the last week is available below.

[Guardian - Caffeine hit: what happens to Britain's 3bn empty coffee cups? \(15/03\)](#)

[Metro - How coffee chains are tricking customers into thinking paper cups can be recycled \(15/03\)](#)

[Telegraph - Coffee chains accused of making false recycling claims \(15/03\)](#)

[Daily Mail - Britain's rubbish at recycling: The billions of coffee cups being dumped every year symbolise the UK's wasteful ways \(16/03\)](#)

[Mirror - Is a coffee cup tax next? Tory minister hints disposable holders could be treated like 5p plastic bags \(17/03\)](#)

[Telegraph - Quickest u-turn on record? Department says minister wrong to suggest coffee cup tax \(17/03\)](#)

[Evening Standard - Coffee cups could face new tax based on 'plastic bag model' \(17/03\)](#)

[Evening Standard - Where to get your morning coffee in a biodegradable eco-cup in London \(17/03\)](#)