

Save a Cup Recycling Company



The Save a Cup scheme was established by the vending, food service and plastics industries to collect the millions of hard-wall polystyrene cups used in the UK every week.

The Save a Cup Recycling Company administers the scheme. With more than 1 billion cups collected so far for recycling, the company's objective is to increase the amount of cups collected in line with Government Targets for recycling packaging waste.

Vending cups are made exclusively from polystyrene and are generally purchased and disposed of within a closed environment. When intercepted at the point of disposal, the level of contamination is low in comparison to other food service items, simplifying separation, handling and reprocessing.

Collection bins are installed close to areas where drinks are consumed. The bins are specifically designed to nest the cups one inside another allowing up to 480 items to be stored before being discharged.

When full, the bins are discharged into polythene sacks and made ready for collection. At regular intervals a specially designated van collects the sacks for reprocessing at a central facility.

The sacks are mechanically opened and sorted for large contaminants such as food waste and paper cups via a separation tank where contaminants are skimmed off. The remainder is fed into a grinder, which reduces the material to flake. Further washing and drying stages complete the decontamination process.

The cleaned flake is then extruded and formed into pellets with physical properties similar to the original polystyrene. This material is then sold for a variety of non-food applications such as video and music cassettes, CD cases, desk tidies, horticultural containers, coat hangers and industrial reels. Due to the possibility of residual contamination the material cannot be re-used for food contact products.

It is currently estimated that 5 billion polystyrene cups per year are used in the UK alone. At an average 4 grams per cup, there are roughly 20,000 tonnes of polystyrene potentially available for recycling every year. Not all of this is readily available, but the growth of vending machines in the work place has resulted in large quantities of cups being available in relatively small catchment areas.

To find out how you can join the scheme or to download an application form visit www.save-a-cup.co.uk.