

PRESS RELEASE

Fighting myths with facts – recycling packaging waste in Germany works.

The German Environment Agency and ZSVR dispel common misconceptions about plastic and glass recycling

Osnabrück/Dessau/Berlin, 27 January 2026

The German Environment Agency (UBA) and the Zentrale Stelle Verpackungsregister (Central Agency Packaging Register – ZSVR) unveiled the latest figures on packaging recycling at their annual press conference on 27 January. They demonstrate that recycling is no myth; it works and is well monitored. Widespread misconceptions about plastic and glass recycling cannot stand up to closer scrutiny.

Recycling rates are stable. 2024 once again saw the recovery of roughly 5.5 million tonnes of packaging waste collected by dual systems. Five out of eight recycling targets were achieved and some were overshoot. As in prior years, packaging made of paper/cardboard, tinplate, aluminium and plastics met statutory quotas. However, the rates for beverage carton, glass and composite packaging fell far short.

70% recycling rate for plastic packaging

The UBA and ZSVR used facts and figures to disprove widespread myths about packaging recycling at the press conference. A major misconception: very little plastic packaging is recycled in Germany.

The fact is: the mechanical plastic recovery rate has increased from 42 percent in 2018 to 70 percent. *'We are particularly pleased with this improvement. That's nearly 30 percentage points more than in 2018. For the first time, more than 70 percent of plastic packaging was transferred for mechanical recycling,'* commented Dr Bettina Rechenberg, Head of the Waste Management Division at the UBA. *'That compellingly disproves the mistaken belief that everything gets incinerated no matter what.'*

Sorting facilities precisely separate packaging

A widely held belief by people: almost everything tossed in the yellow bag or bin gets incinerated anyway. The fact is: more than half the contents of the yellow bin gets recycled. Recycling works. It is measurable and dependable. Modern sorting facilities can sort the contents systematically. Most non-recyclable packaging and sorting errors are transferred for energy recovery and incinerated to generate

energy. It is also important to note that even the most effective sorting facilities cannot make new plastic out of trainers, vacuum bags, water wings and other similar sorting errors.

The statutory quota for recycling the contents of the yellow bin, however, relates to the entire collection volume, including sorting errors and non-recyclable packaging. Ms Gunda Rachut, Chair of the ZSVR, emphasised: *'Even as effective as the sorting and recycling facilities are, they cannot compensate for poor packaging design. The EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) is tightening the recyclability requirements.'* Ms Rachut continued: *'Producers need to take note. As of 2030, packaging placed on the market must be at least 70 percent recyclable or reusable. It is essential that packaging is consistently designed for recyclability.'*

Consistently separating glass groups

Glass packaging that is separated by colour for collection is also critical for successful recycling. When container glass is collected separately by colour, it can be recycled repeatedly. But to fulfil the relevant quotas, higher collection volumes are needed. This is where misconceptions keep popping up: contrary to the widespread belief that waste glass is mixed back together when the containers are emptied, white, green and brown glass consistently remain separated from collection to the glass factory. Modern collection vehicles transport the collected glass in separate chambers. *'Glass recycling saves considerable energy compared to new production,'* said Dr Bettina Rechenberg from the UBA. *'Doing so requires proper waste separation. Too much waste glass is still being lost to residual waste.'* The German Environment Agency believes that container sites and joint efforts on the part of consumers, dual systems, municipalities and retailers are needed to increase collection volumes and the recycling rate. Consumers can find sites for waste glass containers and tips on waste separation at www.muelltrennung-wirkt.de.

Contacts

Dr Bettina Sunderdiek
Central Agency Packaging Register (ZSVR)
Head of Communications and Press
Phone: +49 541 201971-13
presse@verpackungsregister.org
www.verpackungsregister.org

Florian Kuhlmeier
German Environment Agency (UBA)
Press Secretary
Phone: +49 30 8903-2245
presse@uba.de
www.umweltbundesamt.de