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## BUSINESS

# Canada won't come close to goal of eliminating plastic waste by 2030, report finds — and recycling is not the answer

Canada will miss its 2030 target by 2,092,994 metric tonnes if action isn't taken to prevent plastics from becoming waste in the first place, environmental organization's report says.

By **Ghada Alsharif** Staff Reporter

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Canada will fail to achieve its goal to eliminate plastic packaging waste by 2030 without substantial new action by all levels of government, according to a report released Wednesday by NGO Environmental Defence.

If no changes are made to the management of plastic packaging and products to prevent them from becoming waste, Canada will miss its 2030 target by 2,092,994 metric tonnes.

This means that 88 per cent of plastics packaging generated “will continue to be disposed in landfills, incinerated or discarded as pollution,” the report said.

The plastic packaging report, which includes a report card assessing the current performance of Canada's provinces and territories, gives Ontario a failing grade on plastics policy. In fact, the report found that all provincial policies across the country are largely failing, with only two provinces receiving a passing grade — British Columbia (C) and Prince Edward Island (D+).

In June, the federal government [announced](#) it was banning companies from importing or manufacturing plastic bags and takeout containers by the end of this year, from selling them by the end of next year, and from exporting them by the end of 2025.

But Karen Wirsig, the plastics program manager at NGO Environmental Defence, said as long as recycling is seen as the main solution and if plastic is not eliminated at the source, the problem of plastic waste will remain the same.

“We are in a plastic pollution crisis and we're not going to solve that crisis without new measures, notably from the federal government, to reduce reliance on plastic,” Wirsig said. “All levels of government are too focused on recycling as a silver bullet.”

The vast majority of plastic packaging produced and sold in Ontario and across Canada [never gets recycled](#) and most end up in landfills, burned for fuel or in the environment. In 2019, Canada produced around 1.9 million tonnes of plastic packaging and of that, only 12 per cent was sent for recycling, according to a recent report commissioned by the Canada Plastics Pact.

Provincially, the Ford government recently approved a complete [overhaul](#) of Ontario's curbside recycling regime. Between 2023 and 2026, Ontario will transition to a system where stewards — companies such as Loblaw and Unilever — are responsible for both

running and paying for a more centralized blue box program. Toronto is scheduled to be one of the first municipalities to move to the new system, in the summer of 2023.

Wirsig said Ontario's main weakness regarding plastic waste disposal is the lack of a deposit-return system for beverage containers, which she calls "low-hanging fruit when it comes to ensuring that plastic stays out of the environment, landfills and incinerators."

"Fewer containers are collected and recycled in Ontario than almost any other province and we're the biggest province, which means we generate more plastic waste than any other province," Wirsig said.

Despite the reported shortcomings of the province, the Environmental Defence report notes that Ontario's 60 per cent recycling target for rigid plastic — shampoo bottles, berry containers, juice jugs — is the most ambitious goal among all provinces.

But even the most ambitious action may not be enough according to the report.

"Even if all of Canada's provinces and territories were to level up to the most ambitious waste management systems in Canada, and even if we generously assume that the targets for higher rigid plastic were to be achieved for all plastic packaging ... Canada will miss its target by 933,489 (metric tonnes).

This means that 39 per cent of the plastic packaging generated will continue to be disposed in landfill, incinerated, or discarded as pollution."

If all provinces adopted Ontario's target by 2030, "we'd still have nearly a million tonnes of plastic waste because 60 per cent isn't 100 per cent," Wirsig said. "We need to start imposing real requirements on reused and refilled packaging and containers. And we need to get away from the sense that recycling is going to save us."

Echoing similar sentiments, Rod Muir, a former waste campaigner for Sierra Club Canada and the founder of Waste Diversion Toronto, said the government's efforts so far have been nothing more than "virtue signalling."

"I don't see how it's going to be any different or change anything on the ground," Muir said of Ontario's new blue box system.

Muir added that crucial steps to improve plastic waste management include limiting the amount of plastic used in packaging and the elimination of certain types of plastic such as polyvinyl chloride, a nonrecyclable material.

"There needs to be more direction at the federal level," Muir said.



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