

# P-05-1071 Print the vehicle registration on all drive through fast food packaging

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Rhagfyr 2020  
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Reference: RS20/14687-6

Petition Number: P-05-1071

Petition title: Print the vehicle registration on all drive through fast food packaging

Text of petition:

Fast food packaging is a major contributor to littering in the streets of our communities.

We believe printing the vehicle registration on all drive through fast food packaging will help reduce this costly blight.



# 1. Background

In its [How Clean Are Our Streets? 2018-19](#) report, Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) identified fast food waste on an average of 19.6% of Welsh streets.

A 2018 report by Eunomia, commissioned by the Welsh Government, [Options for Extended Producer Responsibility in Wales](#), estimated that ‘around 950 tonnes of takeaway food packaging waste are generated in Wales each year’, and it estimated that ‘only 8.5% is recycled’. It continued:

While accounting for less than 0.06% by weight of Welsh municipal waste arisings, takeaway food packaging is a highly visible component of litter. We estimate that takeaway food packaging waste (which includes expanded polystyrene (EPS) containers) accounts for 1.6% of litter by weight on the ground and in litter bins, but accounts for a larger proportion overall by volume.

One of the most problematic non-recyclable materials is expanded polystyrene (EPS) or foam polystyrene, which fast food packaging is primarily made from. It is exceptionally lightweight and a good insulator, so is effective for keeping food warm. KWT said that, as well as being not commonly recycled, it is problematic because it:

- is light and therefore easily transported by wind and water;
- breaks up into small pieces making it difficult to clean; and
- stays in the environment for a very long time.

Though some industries have made efforts to promote recycling of polystyrene, within the fast food sector no industry-wide approach has been attempted. Some of the largest fast food chains have taken action to replace EPS with biodegradable alternatives, but many smaller independent fast food businesses still regularly use EPS packaging due to its lower per-unit cost.

Fast food cups were also surveyed by KWT, alongside other drinks receptacles, and were found on 5% of Welsh streets.

The Marine Conservation Society’s (MCS) [Great British Beach Clean 2019 report](#) highlighted that small pieces of plastic/polystyrene is still the most commonly found litter on UK beaches, and on average 30.4% of all litter found is that which the public has not disposed of correctly. The report noted that, in Wales, an average of 29 drinks containers are found on every 100m of beach.

## Littering offences and enforcement

The act of leaving litter is an offence under the *Environmental Protection Act 1990* as amended by the *Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005*.

For a littering offence, a person can be issued a fixed penalty notice (FPN) enforcing a fine. The Welsh Government [guidance on FPNs](#) explains that for littering, the amount a local authority can charge ranges between £75-£150, with £75 set as the default. However, if the person fails to pay the fine or repeatedly offends, they can be prosecuted and fined up to £2,500 by the Magistrates' Court. The guidance also says that local authorities have the power to authorise a person to be an Enforcement Officer, enabling them to issue FPNs on behalf of the local authority.

## 2. Welsh Government action

In January 2020 the Welsh Government set out proposals to 'move towards zero waste by 2050' in a new circular economy strategy '[Beyond Recycling](#)'. The [summary of responses](#) included the suggestion of 'using Government levers' to apply 'bans or restrictions to phase out the use of unnecessary, highly littered, single use plastic'. The [stakeholder summary](#) showed that a key point raised by young people is the 'need to take action on litter' for reasons that include 'wildlife and for tourism'.

In [recognition of the significant environmental issues](#) arising from the excess use and inappropriate disposal of single-use items, such as take away food containers and plastic cutlery, on 18 March 2020 the Welsh Government announced its [intention to ban single use plastics](#).

The Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government, Hannah Blythyn MS, said that the proposals are 'part of a wider, integrated approach to address the problems created by excess plastic and litter in communities', and confirmed that 'restrictions [are] due to come into force in the first half of 2021'. A [consultation on the proposals](#) took place between 30 July and 22 October 2020, and responses are currently being reviewed.

On [13 October 2020](#), responsibility for waste policy moved to the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs' portfolio.

In response to this petition, the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths MS ('the Minister'), expressed her determination for Wales to become a 'cleaner nation'. The Minister confirmed that littering from vehicles will be a 'key area of focus' in an upcoming 'Litter Prevention Plan', which the Welsh Government intends to publish 'early next year'. The Minister said that:

The aim of the Plan is to achieve a litter Free Wales and will include proposals to enable waste reduction, education and behavioural change and enforcement action. The plan will highlight potential regulatory interventions, including the introduction of new powers to enable financial penalties to be issued to the owner of a vehicle.

Furthermore, the Minister said that her officials have held initial meetings with relevant businesses to 'discuss printing vehicle registrations on all drive through fast food packaging'. According to the Minister, these meetings highlighted 'a number of potential operational and legal barriers' which officials are 'in the process of better understanding' to 'inform next steps'. The Minister said that the Welsh Government had 'proposed a trail relating to the printing of vehicle registrations on drive through fast food packaging', however:

...due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and concerns over General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements from the fast food companies, we are unable to take this forward at present. My officials continue to work with the sector on this issue and are pursuing other potential interventions which could be introduced in the interim.

The Minister also said that she believes that regulatory and enforcement action to prevent litter is only 'part of the solution', highlighting that 'behavioural change and awareness raising initiatives are equally as important'.

### 3. Welsh Parliament action

The Petitions Committee has considered the following petitions within the theme of reducing fast food waste and/or littering:

- [P-04-547 Ban polystyrene \(ESP\) fast food and drinks packaging : and](#)
- [P-05-750 For single use items: introduce a Deposit Return System for drink containers and make fast food containers and utensils compostable](#)

In its first full meeting in February 2019, the Welsh Youth Parliament chose 'littering and plastic waste' as one of three topics they would tackle. On 5 November 2020, the Welsh Youth Parliament's Littering and Plastic Waste Committee published its report '**Reduce Reuse Recycle**'.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.