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3M innovates to reduce plastic use, improve environmental footprint

Apr 22, 2021



On Earth Day, 3M is committing to reduce our use of new plastic made from petroleum. By 2025, we aim to achieve a new sustainability goal: reduce dependence on virgin fossil-based plastic by 125 million pounds.

“The materials and infrastructure that support a global transition away from petroleum-based plastics are undergoing rapid transformation and there’s palpable momentum for change,” said Gayle Schueller, 3M senior vice president and chief sustainability officer. “3M has a history of applying science to create sustainable alternatives to plastic and with this public goal, it will be easier to share these solutions and collaborate with others on advancing a global circular economy.”

To achieve this new goal, 3M is innovating the products and packaging in our Consumer Business Group. Advancements will include use of recycled content and bio-based plastics, and designs to decrease overall plastic use. Scotch-Brite® Greener Clean Non-Scratch Scrubbers, which are made with 75% post-consumer recycled plastic and encased in recyclable packaging made from 100% recycled content, offer a prime example of the improvements we are making. 3M is implementing our transition away from new plastic quickly and we aim to achieve the 125-million-pound (nearly 56,700 metric tons) reduction—more than five times the weight of the Eiffel Tower—by the end of 2025.

“The time is now,” said Jeff Lavers, group president, 3M Consumer. “The pandemic has created significant new ways of doing business that can benefit both the economy and environment. We will change how we bring products to market, to benefit our customers and our consumers.”

Plastic pollution is a pressing global challenge, and the production of fossil-based plastics negatively impacts the global climate through the release of greenhouse gas emissions. [A recent study](#) from the Center on International Environmental Law found that by 2050, emissions from the plastic industry will be equivalent to those of 615 coal plants—totaling more than 2.75 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e). By reducing use of this material, we can help address these challenges—ultimately aligning with our existing [efforts to minimize waste](#) and 3M’s recent [goal to achieve carbon neutrality in our operations by 2050](#).

3M continues to work with our researchers, engineers, and scientists, as well as suppliers, customers, nongovernmental organizations, and community leaders to improve the circularity of our products and packaging. 3M requires every new product to have a [Sustainability Value Commitment](#) that drives impact for the greater good. Commitments include recyclability, using recycled or renewable materials, opportunities for reuse at the end of a product’s lifespan and more.

“An essential element of becoming more circular is incorporating more recycled content and sustainable biomass in our products,” said Brendan Edgerton, director of circular economy at World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). “Without it, we cannot achieve a society in which nine billion people can live well within planetary boundaries. I applaud 3M’s commitment to the circular economy as illustrated in their new goal and we look forward to supporting them in achieving it.”

3M has been a part of the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#) to advance circular economy since 2019 and is collaborating with fellow members to drive greater global impact. We have supported [The Recycling Partnership](#) for more than four years, and in 2020, we provided the initial investment for its Recycling Inclusion Fund to advance recycling infrastructure and education, and research into the challenges that prevent a more equitable recycling system. 3M was also an initial funder for [Closed Loop Partners](#) in 2014 and joined fellow founding investors to reinvest more than \$54 million in 2020. More recently, 3M has co-funded projects like the U.S. and Canada Recycling Infrastructure and Plastic Waste Map—a first-of-its-kind public tool highlighting and tracking the diversity of plastic waste as well as opportunities to recapture valuable plastics and re-incorporate them into the manufacturing supply chain.

“In a resource-constrained world, advancing a circular economy means moving away from the costly extraction of limited raw materials, including fossil fuels, to make virgin plastic. There are enormous environmental, social and economic benefits to treating existing plastics as a resource, maximizing their value and keeping them in play,” said Bridget Croke, managing director at Closed Loop Partners. “We’re proud to be a long-time partner of 3M; their commitment to reduce their dependence on virgin plastics sets a precedent for how industry leaders can strengthen the market for recycled plastics and drive circularity forward.”

To learn more about how 3M is positively impacting our planet, visit [3M.com/sustainability](#).

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