

PPWR Labelling

How PPWR mandatory labelling requirements may impact the UK

In September 2024, the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) abruptly removed mandatory recycling labelling requirements from the Packaging Regulations.

This last-minute decision was made to prevent creating trade barriers with Northern Ireland and maintain alignment with the EU. The requirements for packaging labelling have remained uncertain since then, with Defra's plans largely undisclosed.

In January 2026 the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) published its technical proposal for harmonised packing labels across member states for Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR).

The proposal shifts the EU from a fragmented member state led approach towards a new system which focuses upon clarity for households and consistency for businesses.

This development is significant for UK businesses because Defra is anticipated to evaluate the guidance and consult on bringing back domestic labelling requirements sometime in 2026.

It is widely expected that Defra will use the JRC's proposal as the foundation for their upcoming consultation.

The JRC proposal outlines the principles for the visual and conceptual design of EU harmonised waste-sorting labels.



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The labels on the packaging will correspond to those used on waste receptacles (e.g bins). For the receptacles, "meta-labels" will be available. These meta-labels are shown in figure 16. It is important to note that meta-labels are exclusively for waste receptacles that collect multiple waste streams—whether commingled or separated—and do not apply to packaging. The meta-labels aim to address one of the top barriers to effective recycling, confusion by the citizen at the point of disposal as they simply have to match the packaging label to the corresponding waste receptacle.

Figure 16. Examples of possibilities to apply labels with various colours to waste receptacles.



The proposed option is to include additional information alongside the label can be found below in figure 23. This aims to help consumers correctly identify packaging and ensure its disposal aligns with local sorting regulations.

