

# PACK GREEN COALITION

The Biden Administration has taken a significant step toward reducing unnecessary plastic waste. Recently, the General Services Administration – the federal agency that makes decisions on what products the government will buy -- requested comments regarding the use of plastics in packaging and shipping.

As an organization driven to replace unnecessary plastic within the global packaging and food service supply chains, [Pack Green](#) has submitted comments and will push hard for more sustainable packaging alternatives.

We are in a global plastics crisis. The UN Environment Programme reports that there are 11 million metric tons of plastic entering the ocean annually, and this number is expected to triple in the next twenty years without **urgent action**. They also estimate that 36% of all plastics produced are used in single-use packaging, including food and beverage containers. With the rapid expansion of e-commerce and with global plastic consumption expected to grow from 460 million metric tons in 2019 to 1,231 million metric tons by 2060, this means that shifting away from plastic packaging and towards sustainable packaging is crucial to preserving our environment.

We at Pack Green believe that readily available sustainable packaging alternatives to plastic can effectively fulfill the needs of GSA's contractors, while also helping to further grow the market and demand for these products. GSA should be able to make quick changes – as there are countless examples of sustainable products that can immediately replace single use packaging. For example:

- [Ranpak Holding Corp.](#) has replaced the need for plastic bubble wrap with a 100% curbside recyclable product called Geami® which protects products during shipping while wicking away moisture and reducing void fill requirements. This is a product available today that could be used by USPS in place of plastic bubble wrap.
- Similarly, for disposable food and beverage packaging, GSA could reduce plastic waste by procuring paper containers that are lined with a seaweed coating. A company called [Notpla](#) created this biodegradable coating, which replaces the plastic or bioplastic lining that is typically used to prevent leakage from food containers. Seaweed is even a compostable packaging solution for ketchup packets and bottled water.
- In the context of electronics, appliances, and fragile consumer packaged goods, a company called [Cruz Foam](#) has developed a packaging material using all naturally occurring materials to replace harmful Styrofoam while offering the same performance and at the same price.

There are three overarching factors we encourage GSA to consider when trying to improve the sustainability of the packaging products their contractors use: (1) decreasing leakage into the environment; (2) reducing greenhouse gas emissions/carbon footprint; and (3) improving circularity, which includes increasing recycling rates, using more recycled content, saving energy and reducing pressure on natural resources. Focusing on only one or two factors may cause the sustainability of the packaging material to suffer when viewed over the course of its entire life cycle. It is crucial that GSA

takes this opportunity to not only help reduce the carbon footprint of the federal government, but also to protect natural resources that have been depreciated with the ubiquitous use of plastics.

Pack Green has encouraged GSA to take the following key steps to contribute to a more circular economy when revising its procurement rules:

- **Move quickly.** For many products, including but by no means limited to those noted above, solutions are available right now and are already in use both in the U.S and abroad. GSA does not need to wait to start using these products. We have encouraged GSA to immediately switch to sustainable products and start making a difference now.
- **Make changes where possible, when possible.** There are numerous sustainable packaging alternatives available on the market today, including, but not limited to, paper, mycelium, seaweed, and wool. These packaging materials can protect glass or other breakable items during shipping. They are used to create sturdy, greaseproof, and easily disposable food containers. Even challenges to keeping food and pharmaceuticals below required temperatures during transit have been solved by utilizing some of these materials.
- **Minimum standards based on percentage actually recycled.** “Recyclable” does not mean a product is actually getting recycled. GSA should use this opportunity to require that any packaging used by its contractors (1) is actually collected in one of the curbside programs within geographic proximity of its end use, (2) can be sorted into defined streams, and (3) can be reclaimed at facilities that meet generally accepted recovery standards.
- **Truth in labeling.** GSA should also require that a product may only be labelled as “recyclable” if it meets the recyclability thresholds mentioned above and if the material type and form routinely becomes feedstock used in the production of new products or packaging. Mere access to recycling is not sufficient. Products must be determined to be actually recycled at a significant level and put back into commerce.

Pack Green applauds this important step by the Biden Administration to leverage the GSA’s purchasing power to reduce the use of single use plastics and looks forward to help in the transition to a circular economy.