

China Reinforces Governance of Plastic Pollution that Certain Plastic Products have been Restricted

On 19th January 2020, National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Ecological Environment have jointly published "Opinions regarding further reinforcing plastic pollution governance" ("opinion" hereafter). This opinion requested to build up and refine long-term management plan, the principal concept is managing plastic products from various dimensions in order to continuously govern plastic pollution from life-cycle perspective. It set up three strategic timelines to prohibit and restrict certain plastic products, end of 2020, 2022 and 2025. Table 1 and 2 provide regulated plastic products and timeline.

Source: https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfb/tz/202001/t20200119_1219275.html

Table 1 Prohibition and Restriction of Certain Plastic Products

	End of 2020	End of 2022	End of 2025
Thin plastic bags with thickness<0.025mm, PE mulching film with thickness<0.01mm, single-use tableware made of expanded polystyrene, single-use cotton buds with plastic stick	Prohibition of production and sale.	/	/
Non-degradable plastic bag	Prohibition in shops, takeaway service, exhibition events in some cities.	Prohibition expands to prefecture-level and above cities, and coastal county-level cities.	Prohibition expands to marketplaces of those areas.
Cosmetic products containing microbeads	Prohibition of production.	Prohibition of sale.	
Single-use plastic tableware	Nationwide prohibition of non-degradable single-use straw in catering service; prohibition of non-degradable single-use tableware for eat in catering service in prefecture-level and above cities, tourist attraction sites.	Prohibition of non-degradable single-use tableware for eat in catering service in county-level and above cities, tourist attraction sites.	Consumption of non-degradable single-use tableware for takeaway in prefecture-level and above cities reduced by 30%.
Single-use plastic products in hotel	/	Shall not provide single-use plastic products voluntarily in star ranked hotels nationwide.	Expanding the restriction to all hotels and Homestays.
Plastic packaging for express	/	Postal networks in Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, etc, shall prohibit non-degradable plastic packaging bags, woven sacks, shall reduce consumptions of non-degradable plastic tapes.	Postal networks in nationwide shall prohibit non-degradable plastic packaging bags, woven sacks, tapes, etc.
Plastic products made from medical waste	Prohibition of production and sale.	/	/
Import of plastic waste	Prohibition.	/	/

Table 2 Classification of plastic products subject to prohibition or restriction (2020 version)

1. Plastic shopping bags thinner than 0.025mm Plastic shopping bag thinner than 0.025mm that used for containing and carrying goods, the product scope shall refer to GB/T 21661 Plastic shopping bag.
2. Polyethylene mulch films for agricultural uses thinner than 0.01mm Non-degradable mulch film for agricultural uses that primarily made of polyethylene, the product scope, thickness, strength performance shall refer to GB 13735 Polyethylene blown mulch film for agricultural uses
3. single-use expanded plastic tableware Single-use tableware that made of expanded plastic materials.
4. Single-use plastic cotton buds Single-use cotton bud that made of plastic sticks, excluding cotton buds classified as medical devices.
5. Cosmetic products containing plastic microbeads Rinse-off cosmetic products for scrubbing, exfoliation or cleansing purposes, which intentionally added solid plastic particles with size<5mm, such as shower gel, cleansing balm, scrubbing cream, shampoo, tooth paste and tooth powder..
6. Plastic products made from medical waste Plastic products made from wasted materials that been regulated under "medical waste management ordinance" and "classification list of medical waste".
7. Non-degradable plastic bags Plastic bags for containing and carrying goods that used in shopping malls, super market, pharmacy stores, bookstores, food takeaway services, exhibition events, etc. Excluding plastic pre-packaging bags, drum-linkage bags, food bags that used to hold unpackaged food such as fresh food, cooked food, etc.

8. Single-use plastic cutlery Non-degradable, single-use plastic knives, forks, spoons using in restaurants, excluding single-use plastic cutleries for pre-packaged food.
9. Single-use plastic straw Non-degradable, single-use plastic straw for drinking liquid food for catering serviced, excluding plastic straws attached on milk or other drinks packaging.
This list will be revised that depending on actual execution issues. Single-use products used for emergency response, product distribution, catering service during public emergency events such as natural disasters, accidents, public health incidents and social security incidents.

Various provinces and municipalities prepared relevant policies which share similar timeline, the pilot started in major cities from end of 2020, and then eventually expand at end of 2022, 2025 to reach prohibition or restriction in entire region. Some well-developed regions have set up more stringent requirements. For example, Shanghai has tighter requirements on prohibited plastic bags, earlier timeline for prohibition and restriction, and larger area of implementation. Zhejiang province requests completing those targets two years prior national policy, and managing plastic pollution in rural area ahead of other regions.

Just before the national opinion has been announced, Hainan province has enacted “Hainan economic zone provisions to prohibiting non-degradable single-use plastic products” (Hainan provision hereafter). It has larger scope and more detailed, and enforced from 1st January December 2020 within the entire province. Apart of plastic shopping bag, general purpose plastic bags, composite packaging bags made from paper and plastic, refuse sacks are also prohibited, the prohibition on tableware also covering both containers and caps.

Since the Hainan provision entered into force, plastic bags, refuse sacks been placed on the market are now biodegradable products. Local authority requests those biodegradable products shall be labelled by registered QR code, therefore consumers and local authority can identify authenticity of biodegradable products quickly. Based on recent press release, Hainan administration of market regulation (AMR) conducted enforcement regarding sale prohibited plastic products. 1909 companies been inspected, 25 companies and individual persons will be further investigated for suspected violation, and involved 5240 CNY of product value in total. Additionally, 1 packaging material company in Hainan that producing PE bags was found false labelling as fully biodegradable, falsifying China environmental products labelling. The Hainan AMR proposed 1 million CNY penalty on this company based on Anti-unfair competition law.

Additionally, Chinese domestic standards started to integrate biodegradability of plastic products in recent years, and more standard is under drafting and revision. Those standards will eventually harmonise relevant definitions, requirements, and product labelling. Figure 1 shows labelling of biodegradable plastic bags that purchased from shops.

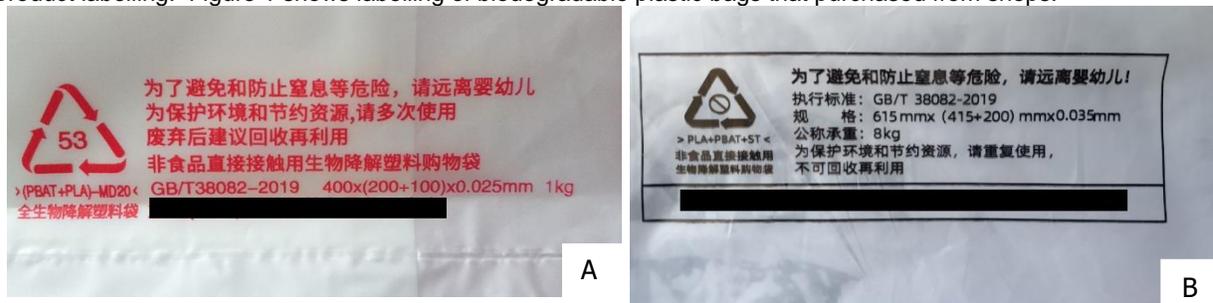


Fig.1 Both products A and B claimed GB/T 38082-2019 Biodegradable plastic shopping bags, and indicated that made of biodegradable plastics, PLA and PBAT.

- Sources: <http://fgw.sh.gov.cn/gfxwj/20200928/84e1ba896b57451587ddc5cfae07bf19.html>
http://fzggw.zj.gov.cn/art/2020/9/16/art_1229123351_1435073.html
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