

Swire Coca-Cola Hong Kong could take the lead in achieving Coca-Cola's reuse ambitions

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We are a group of NGOs devoted to the environment and sustainable development in Hong Kong. This joint letter is our response to The Coca-Cola Company's recently announced commitment "to have at least 25% of all beverages globally across its portfolio of brands sold in refillable/returnable glass or plastic bottles, or refillable containers through a traditional fountain or Coca-Cola Freestyle dispensers".

At a time when more than two million people and over 700 civil society groups from 113 countries are demanding governments sign a global, legally-binding agreement to end plastic pollution, we urge beverage manufacturing companies like The Coca-Cola Company and its East Asia franchisee Swire Coca-Cola, as well as the Hong Kong government, to set higher plastic reduction targets, accelerate relevant measures, and exercise more accountability and transparency in measure effectiveness. Our appeals are as follows:

1. We welcome, albeit with caution, The Coca-Cola Company's (TCCC) new global commitment to have at least 25% of beverages sold in refillable/returnable packaging by 2030. As one of the top-branded single-use plastic pollution contributors in the world, The Coca-Cola Company has made plenty of commitments since the 1990s, but not all were fulfilled in the promised time frame.
2. Swire Coca-Cola (SCC), the franchisee of The Coca-Cola Company for East Asia and parts of the west coast of the US, is also a joint venture partner in a new plastic bottle recycling facility in Hong Kong. We look forward to learning about how SCC will increase their reusable packaging as well as offer alternative distribution methods, such as beverage fountains, which will help eliminate packaging altogether. As beverage fountains require the use of cups, a reusable container rental programme that complements customers' ability to bring their own tumbler is needed to minimize the use of disposable cups. The rental fee of such a reusable container program serves as an economic incentive to encourage customers to make good use of the system by returning the container.
3. 25% is a global target. Considering Hong Kong's developed economy, Swire Coca-Cola Hong Kong should aim high and set a more aggressive target – to get ahead of other regions and achieve more than 25% of their products with refillable/reusable containers before 2030.
4. Refillable/returnable packaging does not equate to the packaging being refilled. If reusable or returnable plastic bottles end up in landfills, they can become a liability to a sustainable, waste-free society. We urge Swire Coca-Cola to support the collection of beverage packaging to ensure that refillable containers do get reused and that recyclable packaging is collected for handling at

a recycling facility. Information disclosure helps the public to monitor the initiative and develop trust in the brand. Swire Coca-Cola should not only disclose, annually, the annual percentage of packaging which is returnable, but also what has actually been returned and reused/refilled.

5. As waste charging has been legislated and will commence in 2023, beverage manufacturing companies need to make reuse and recycling commitments now to show how serious they are about helping their customers manage their waste footprint and associated expenditure that stem from enjoying their products. We encourage all beverage manufacturers including Vitasoy and A.S. Watson Group to share their commitments to reduce packaging waste with refillable packaging and non-packaged options.
6. The Hong Kong government completed a public consultation on the plastic beverage bottle producer responsibility scheme (PPRS) in May 2021 but no major announcement has been released since then. We urge the government to initiate the legislation procedures of the PPRS at LegCo quickly. As the industry is moving on this issue, the government can leverage this industry momentum by adding both reuse and recycling targets into the coming LegCo PPRS Bill, along with adequate enforcement mechanisms to encourage the beverage industry to announce their timetables to achieve those targets. We also encourage the government to include all beverage packaging formats in the PRS on beverage containers to stop the switch from a regulated container format to an unregulated type, which might be worse from an environmental standpoint.

Fossil fuel and its by-products are the major cause of climate change. We are at a critical juncture where more measurable corporate climate actions, effective government oversight and regulations, and cooperation from the public are needed more than ever. We look forward to more ambitious plastic reduction, reuse, and recycling targets with a solid action plan and timetable on the actions above from Swire Coca-Cola, other major beverage manufacturers, and the Hong Kong government.

Signatories of this Joint Letter (in alphabetical order)

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