

# PRESS RELEASE

Under embargo until 29/09/2022

## Trade associations set quality standard for recycled plastic

The Environmental Services Association, with support from the British Plastics Federation (BPF), Recycling Association and RECOUP, has today (29/09/2022) published a defined quality standard for post-consumer recycled plastics, with the aim of driving consistent standards across the sector.

The *Quality Standard for Recycled Plastics*, published today, was drafted by the ESA in consultation with the aforementioned organisations as well as ESA members. The clearly-defined standard applies to materials destined for export and goes beyond existing regulatory compliance requirements, building on best practice to help drive-up the quality of baled post-consumer plastic materials.

The position of the Environment Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is that materials should be *substantially free of contamination*. However, neither organisation defines a percentage limit for contamination and this has, in the past, resulted in subjective judgements being disputed.

While the Quality Standard does not replace the regulatory position or requirements of regulators, which will remain in place, the document provide evidence of a clear, objective, commercial baseline standard agreed by organisations across the post-consumer value-chain (ie sellers and buyers). This standard will ensure consistency of quality and sets a benchmark for all operators to adhere to – something which ESA members agree to phase in within the next twelve months.

This includes the collection and review of inspection and monitoring data, which will be used to develop and refine the standard over time – ensuring it remains fit for purpose. The *Quality Standard for Recycled Plastic* builds upon the ESA's **Standard for Responsible Export**, released in 2020, and work is currently underway to create widely agreed commercial standards for other secondary materials.

**Executive Director of the ESA, Jacob Hayler, said:** “Setting and delivering high standards for the sector is a strategic priority for the ESA and, by establishing a clear, objective, quality standard, we hope to bring consistency to output quality and provide a useful reference tool for both sellers and buyers of this material – supporting a market that remains vital to the UK’s circular economy.”

**Senior Recycling Issues Executive at the British Plastics Federation, Helen Jordan, said:** “Understanding the quality of material is key for the development of a circular economy and for effective plastic recycling to take place. The BPF supported the development of this quality standard for bales of plastic as it is essential that material destined overseas can be efficiently recycled. An aim within the BPF’s Recycling Roadmap was to eliminate the export of low-quality material and identifying and developing this standard is a step towards achieving this.”

**Simon Ellin from the Recycling Association, said:** “We are delighted to be part of a trade association partnership that has delivered a workable standard that all sectors of the industry can adopt. A key weakness in our day-to-day operations is the absence of tangible standards, but the standard we have now produced will not only help to improve quality, but should also facilitate clearer regulation, reduce risk and encourage investment.”

**Stuart Foster, CEO of RECOUP, said:** “RECOUP has published and supported a number of bale specification documents over the years to try and encourage good practices. The opportunity to bring together previous guidance and support the development of a new relevant collaborative specifications document with the ESA, underpinned by practical current market requirements, was too good an opportunity to miss. We encourage the sector to make use of the new quality standards which will ensure the recycled plastic market demand and supply specifications are aligned.”

## ENDS

Notes to editors:

A. The Environmental Services Association (ESA) is the trade association representing the UK’s resource and waste management industry. Our members are directly delivering the UK’s transformation to a more circular economy and are leading the sector’s efforts to decarbonise recycling and waste management operations.

The ESA works with government, regulators and the public to deliver sustainable and high-performing waste and resource management solutions for the UK. Our strategic priorities are to set high operational standards for the sector; to deliver more recycling and focus on up-stream interventions to eliminate waste; and to decarbonise our sector by 2040. You can find out more about the ESA and our members’ work in our **Annual Report** for 2020/21.

B. An advance copy of the document is appended to this press release for your information. This should not be re-published please. The document is available for free to view and download on the ESA’s website at [www.esauk.org](http://www.esauk.org) **[DIRECT LINK TBC]**

### Media contact

ESA Press Office: 020 7591 3214

Email: [b-johnson@esauk.org](mailto:b-johnson@esauk.org)