

POLYBAG COLLECTION SCHEME PILOT



THE POLYBAG CHALLENGE

Roughly 180 billion polybags are produced each year to store, transport, and protect apparel and footwear. However, less than 15% of all polybags in circulation are collected for recycling. A lack of infrastructure to collect and sort this waste, leads to contamination and low recycling rates. With the correct infrastructure, polybags could provide a clean and pure waste stream, which can be recycled back into high-quality, clear film - closing the loop on polybags.

POLYBAG COLLECTION SCHEME: TRIALING A SOLUTION

The London Polybag Collection Scheme was launched in February 2020. This pilot was orchestrated by Fashion for Good in partnership with adidas, Kering Brands (Saint Laurent, Alexander McQueen and Balenciaga), and Stella McCartney, with First Mile - a UK-based waste collector that offers specialist recycling services.

The brand partners consolidated polybag waste in select London retail stores. First Mile collected the polybag waste and diverted it for recycling into new plastic sacks, which were delivered back to the brands to collect polybag waste. The pilot tested the ability to develop a scalable recycling infrastructure for collection and recycling of garment polybags.

Please note: Initially scoped to run from February until April 2020, the pilot and results were greatly impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021.

THE PILOT SUCCESS STORY

The Polybag Collection Scheme Pilot achieves four key goals:

1. Cost to brands

Brands remained cost neutral or saved on waste collection costs when creating a mono-material waste stream. Separate plastic waste can be up to 35-40% cheaper to dispose of than general waste to brands.

2. Increased recycling of polybags

Brands recycled up to 5 tonnes of polybag waste from retail stores.

3. Viable for waste collector

Collecting mono-waste streams of polybags enabled easier collection and recycling of high-quality and high-purity polybag waste.

4. High quality waste stream

100% of polybag waste was recycled due to its high quality and low contamination, creating a potential circular solution for the brands in the future.

KEY LEARNINGS

A qualitative survey was conducted with all stakeholders, with 3 key learnings being shared:

1. Measurement of polybag waste composition is key in identifying the most suitable waste management solutions. Audit, measure, manage.

2. Creation of instore infrastructure (e.g. bin in stock room) for separate disposal of polybag waste is important to facilitate separate collection.

3. Educating staff on the importance of polybag collection and recycling schemes helps to build engagement and uptake.

CALL TO ACTION: SCALING THE PILOT

- Implement polybag collection across all retail stores using First Mile's direct truck collection in London and Birmingham, or nationally through First Mile's courier network.
- Capture polybags through a back-haul model, where retailers use their existing network and deliveries to transport polybag waste collected at the store level back to the distribution centre for baling and shipment to First Mile processors. This saves on transportation emissions and increases polybag waste collected.
- Identify waste collectors and recyclers in various regions to trial polybag waste collection and recycling across different nations.

KEY STATS

Brand stakeholders: adidas, C&A, Kering brands (Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, Saint Laurent), Stella McCartney

Project Length & Geography: 9 months in London, UK (disrupted by COVID-19)

Waste Collector: First Mile, a UK-based waste collector and recycling service provider

Press release & Report: [Press Release](#) | [Polybags in the Fashion Industry: Evaluating the Options](#)

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