



Reimagining plastic as a sustainability solution

Plastic is viewed as an environmental threat due to our misuse despite its vital contributions to packaging, auto, medicine and food and preservation industries, and even climate solutions

PLASTIC, NAMED after the Greek word *plastikos* meaning something which can be moulded or shaped, was once a hallmark of human invention, but today it is seen as a symbol of environmental harm – not because of its nature, but due to our inability to use it responsibly and innovatively.

While harmful effects of plastic usage are widely known, it's time to recognise its contribution in the fields of medicine and food preservation, and even tackling global warming.

Viral Thakker, Partner and Leader – Sustainability and Climate, Deloitte South Asia, says, "Plastic, when designed for reuse and properly managed, can significantly support both ecological resilience and economic growth—especially as global populations rise, and resource pressures intensify."

Food industry

According to a report by LyondellBasell, Public Policy UN (United Nations) Plastics Agreement, plastic packaging helps enhance food items life span considerably depending on the type of food, thereby helping in tackling one of the biggest problems of global food waste which apart from human cost also contributes almost 10% of greenhouse emissions, according to United Nations Environment Programme.

K Ganesh, Director - Sustainability & Corporate Affairs, Bisleri International, says, "Plastic is a wonderful material if managed responsibly. In the beverage industry, especially for packaged drinking water companies, plastic packaging plays an indispensable function. The food-grade PET bottles maintain product purity, prevent contamination, increase the product shelf life, and ensure safe consumption across India's diverse climatic conditions and distribution networks.



Automobile industry

Plastic has completely transformed the automobile industry through the various benefits that can cut costs and at the same time improve vehicle performance, which is a win-win situation for the industry. Being lighter than metals, plastic usage makes vehicles lighter, increases fuel efficiency and thereby reduces emissions.

Avesh Memon, Founder & CEO of Rilox EV, says, "The transition to lighter vehicles through the integration of high-performance plastics is more than just a design choice—it's a strategic move towards greater energy efficiency. In the EV space, where every gram matters, reducing vehicle weight directly improves range and reduces energy consumption. What many overlook

is that this also lessens the environmental load even at the electricity generation level, especially in countries still transitioning away from fossil fuels. Lightweight engineering is enabling us to build smarter, cleaner, and more accessible electric mobility solutions for the future."

According to a paper, published in Science Direct, a journal, Fuel consumption and CO2 emissions from passenger cars in Europe – Laboratory versus real-world emissions a 100 kg reduction represents fuel savings of 0.3–0.5 l/100 km (6%–10% for a fuel consumption of 5 l/100 km).

Packaging industry

Packaging industry is the one which has

benefitted the most from the invention of plastic. Plastic has made packaging cost effective, increased the shelf life of products and again its property of being moulded into any shape has helped in creating packaging for any type of products at a very cost effective price point.

The challenge is to achieve the goal of reaching a stage where all plastic that is manufactured is biodegradable, recyclable and which causes minimal harm to the environment if not zero harm.

Jeevaraj Gopal Pillai, Director - Sustainability, President - Flexible Packaging and New Product Development, UFlex, says plastic is crucial for modern development since it propels growth in numerous aspects of daily life and the economy. Given that there are 8.2 billion people on the planet, we cannot overlook the importance of flexible packaging in providing goods for consumers like food and medications while maintaining their durability, safety, and capacity to prevent contamination.

He adds, "A McKinsey report found that in five of six flexible packaging categories, plastic had lower greenhouse gas emissions than non-plastic alternatives. In contrast, materials like glass, rigid PET, and steel require significantly more water and fossil fuels to produce. The problem isn't plastic itself, but how we manage its lifecycle."

Medical field

One of the fields that has benefited the most with the invention of plastic is the medical field. Plastic can be easily sterilised and its single use property has helped immensely in reducing contamination cases and considerably reduced cases of deadly diseases like HIV and Hepatitis. Experts point out that its property of being easily moulded into any shape has helped the medical field to make new devices, thereby helping millions of people through new innovations in a much more cost effective way as plastic is com-

paratively much cheaper compared to metals or other alternatives.

Medical grade plastics are biocompatible and are used particularly in medical components that interface with the circulatory system in addition to machines used for MRI, syringes and even assistive products like prosthetics.

Electronics and construction

The very fact that plastic does not corrode or rust is a game changer for the electronics and construction industry. The durability and the lightweight of plastic helps in easier handling and faster turnaround time for projects and is easier to handle for the labour, too. Today recycled plastic is being used in making roads, brick, tiles, insulation and so on. There is no doubt that plastic has been one of the most important inventions of mankind and it is actually driving the world today. What the world needs is the policies and actions to take the recycled plastic percentage to as high as possible, arrange awareness campaigns amongst people making them understand how to rightly use and dispose off plastic products.

Suresh Bansal, Founder & CEO, DCGpac, says, "When reused, recycled, and repurposed intelligently, plastic contributes to circular economy and can significantly reduce carbon footprint. It's not about eliminating plastic, it's about using it wisely, designing smarter systems, and holding ourselves accountable for its life cycle. Let's stop calling plastic the problem and start being the solution. Innovation must meet intention. That's the future we need to build."

Plastic industry is growing worldwide at an exponential rate and all they need is to keep innovating and inventing new ways to make plastic more environmentally friendly.

Ajeet Sharma is a contributor to the *Sustainability Karma* podcast, which broadcasts on All India Radio



India's landmark EPR regulations—ambitious yet pragmatic—have placed the nation at the forefront of a global recycling revolution. In April 2025, India became the first major nation to mandate and enforce the use of recycled plastics in packaging. Since 2014, Banyan Nation has pioneered innovations tailored for India's unique needs, consistently aligning with the country's evolving sustainability and regulatory landscape.

We've placed over 2 billion recycled bottles back on store shelves, proving waste can become high-quality, traceable materials. As we scale to 50,000 tonnes per year and launch recycled flexible packaging - addressing nearly 70% of plastic waste - our partnerships with Unilever, Shell, Reckitt, and ITC show how recycling fuels growth and stewardship. By integrating kabadiwallas and gig workers, we drive inclusive circular economy solutions that are unique to the Indian waste ecosystem.

With AI-driven traceability and advanced washing tech, Banyan Nation is ready for the exponential demand EPR will bring. This is Bharat's moment. On World Environment Day, let's make recycled packaging the norm.

Mani Vajipey
CEO, Banyan Nation



Redefining packaging: UFlex leads the sustainability revolution

ADVERTORIAL

In a world where the packaging sector is often criticised for its environmental impact, UFlex offers a counter-narrative—one where ingenuity, responsibility and innovation converge to create a sustainable future

UFlex stands tall as India's largest multinational in flexible packaging, renowned globally for redefining packaging excellence through innovation, sustainability, and customer-centric solutions. Since its inception in 1985, the company has cultivated an outstanding reputation for delivering world-class packaging solutions that extend the shelf life of food and other packed products. Over the years, it has become the preferred partner for leading global brands, thanks to its unwavering focus on quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction. What began as a domestic enterprise has today transformed into a multi-billion-dollar global player—a testament to its commitment to trust, value creation, and sustainable growth.

UFlex's influence in the packaging industry is defined not just by scale but by excellence. As a pioneering solutions provider, it offers innovations that preserve product freshness while ensuring eco-conscious operations. Amid growing concerns about environmental sustainability and packaging waste, UFlex stands at the forefront of a new era in flexible packaging—where utility meets responsibility.

Role of recycling ecosystems in the packaging sector

Recycling ecosystems play a pivotal role in the packaging industry's journey towards sustainability. As plastic consumption soars globally, so does the urgency to reduce environmental impact. Effective recycling systems can bridge the gap between use and reuse—transforming post-consumer waste into valuable resources and reducing dependency on virgin raw materials. Within the



UFlex's packaging films plant in Poland that houses a mixed flexible waste recycling facility—part of the company's global recycling infrastructure

packaging sector, this shift toward circularity not only mitigates landfill accumulation and oceanic pollution but also unlocks economic and energy efficiencies.

A robust recycling ecosystem ensures that materials once deemed as waste—like multi-layer plastics and aseptic cartons—are reintegrated into production cycles. This leads to less resource extraction, reduced footprint, and longer material life cycles. In doing so, recycling becomes more than a process—it evolves into a sustainable business model that supports both environmental and industrial goals.

With global demand for recycled content in packaging reaching new heights, especially for certified food-grade materials, the packaging sector's investment in recycling technologies is crucial. It allows the industry to transition from a linear to a circular economy, where sustainability is embedded into the design, use, and reuse of every packaging component.

UFlex's groundbreaking recycling model

In this context, UFlex has emerged as a frontrunner by building one of the most comprehensive recycling ecosystems in the global packaging sector. With a robust recycling capacity exceeding 72,300 metric tonnes per annum and an additional 39,600 metric tonnes set to be commissioned in FY26—UFlex has already recycled over 5 billion post-consumer PET bottles, converting them into sustainable packaging solutions. In FY25 alone, UFlex processed 8,200 metric tonnes of mixed flexible waste, reaffirming its steadfast commitment to circularity. The company was the first globally to successfully recycle complex mixed



UFlex's packaging solution made with post-consumer recycled content (PCR)

flexible waste containing inks, adhesives, and metallized layers. Its capacity to recycle materials like PET, polypropylene (PP), and polyethylene (PE) positions UFlex as a technological leader in the field.

Among its many innovations, the Enzymatic Delamination Technology stands out. Traditionally, multi-layer aseptic packaging—comprising paper, polyethylene, and aluminum foil—has been considered non-recyclable due to its complex structure. UFlex has turned this challenge into an opportunity with an enzyme-based process that gently separates bonded layers. This results in high-quality paper pulp, which can be re-used to produce printable paper, while the separated foil laminate is transformed into value-added products like weather-resistant roofing sheets, tray

plates, laptop covers, and partition boards. These products not only reduce the heat load in buildings but also promote sustainable construction practices across industries.

Moreover, UFlex produces food-contact-grade recycled PET (rPET) films approved by the U.S. FDA and India's FSSAI. Addressing a market with an annual estimated demand of 124,000 tonnes of certified rPET, the company's offerings represent a scalable and safe solution to the plastic waste challenge.

Another transformative innovation from UFlex is the "single-pellet solution," which combines 30% or more recycled PET with virgin PET to create packaging that retains high strength and clarity while significantly reducing acetaldehyde content. This solution is designed to work seamlessly with existing manufacturing infrastructure, enabling brands to shift towards circular packaging without incurring additional capital costs. It exemplifies how innovation and practicality can co-exist to drive environmental progress.

Government of India's EPR legislation

The Government of India has taken decisive steps to tackle the plastic crisis by implementing the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework. This regulatory approach mandates producers, importers, and brand owners to manage the lifecycle of the plastic packaging they introduce into the market. With specific targets for collection, recycling, reuse, and incorporation of recycled content, the EPR regulations aim to instill accountability throughout the supply chain.

EPR not only shifts responsibility to producers

■ UFlex is the first Indian company to receive US FDA certification for food-contact recycled polyethylene (rPE) and recycled polypropylene (rPP). It stands as the only Indian flexible packaging company with food-grade recycling certifications across PET, PE, and PP.

■ In line with its commitment to support the Government of India's Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation, UFlex announced a significant investment of ₹317 crore to strengthen its recycling capabilities. Its enhanced recycling operations will empower brand owners to meet their EPR commitments and set a global benchmark for sustainable packaging.

but also incentivizes innovation in waste management and recycling technologies. It sets a new benchmark for sustainable packaging practices in India and aligns the nation with global environmental goals. By promoting transparent reporting, traceability, and compliance, EPR legislation is transforming the packaging landscape from a linear model of consumption to a regenerative cycle of reuse.

As the EPR mandates take a stronger hold, companies are required to invest in infrastructure, partnerships, and technologies that support sustainable outcomes. This legislative backing ensures that environmental stewardship is no longer optional—it becomes an operational imperative for all stakeholders in the packaging sector. The Indian packaging industry is well-positioned to comply with the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) guidelines. It has proactively aligned with the Government of India's vision by making significant investments to establish an advanced recycling infrastructure. These investments have significantly enhanced the country's capacity to process plastic waste, with a particular focus on food-grade recycled polyethylene terephthalate (rPET).

Leading India's EPR-driven future

Recognising the significance of EPR, UFlex has aligned its operations to support the government's sustainability vision. The company has announced a substantial investment of ₹317 crore to further enhance its recycling infrastructure. This includes setting up two state-of-the-art recycling plants in Noida, in addition to its global recycling facilities in India, Poland, Egypt, and Mexico, processing post-consumer mixed flexible waste, multi-layer aseptic packaging (MLAP), and polyethylene terephthalate (PET) waste.

Through its advanced solutions, UFlex enables brand owners to meet their regulatory obligations under EPR while also adopting global best practices. The company's leadership in food-grade recycling for PET, PE, and PP has made it the only Indian packaging firm with certifications across all three major polymers—solidifying its position as a sustainability trailblazer.

In addition, UFlex has embraced advanced tools like Plastic Material Passports (PMPs), blockchain-based traceability platforms, and digital watermarking systems. These technologies track the origin, composition, and recycling cycles of plastic materials, ensuring transparency and authenticity. Such systems help mitigate the risk of greenwashing and reinforce consumer trust in sustainability claims.

UFlex's sustainability agenda also resonates at the global level. Its official membership in the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) further affirms its commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles. Through these concerted efforts, the company is not just complying with regulations but setting new benchmarks for sustainable innovation.

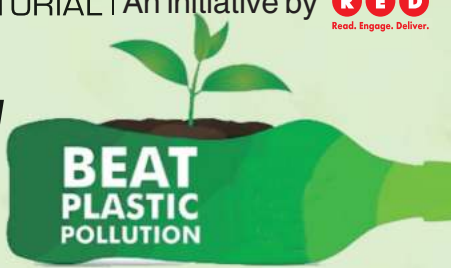
A vision for circular prosperity

As an industry leader driving environmental transformation through innovation and commitment, UFlex's journey is exemplary. By embedding sustainability into every aspect of its operations—from raw material sourcing to post-consumer waste processing—the company is redefining what it means to be a responsible business in today's world.

As the global conversation around plastics intensifies, UFlex continues to chart a path that balances industrial growth with ecological preservation. Its recycling capabilities, technological innovations, and alignment with national policies position it as a beacon of progress in the packaging industry.



World Environment Day



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Leading India's EPR-driven future

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As the global conversation around plastics intensifies, UFlex continues to chart a path that balances industrial growth with ecological preservation. Its recycling capabilities, technological innovations, and alignment with national policies position it as a beacon of progress in the packaging industry.