

How Coca-Cola is supporting the circular economy

By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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An ambitious sustainable packaging strategy, World Without Waste, was launched in 2018 by The Coca-Cola Company. This strategy aims to create systemic change by focusing on the circular economy for packaging, from how bottles and cans are designed and manufactured to how they're recycled and reused.



Image supplied by PETCO

Simply put, World Without Waste is a global sustainable packaging strategy focused on three primary goals: Design, Collect and Partner.

The Coca-Cola Company (Coca-Cola) has stated that it has a responsibility to help solve the global plastic waste crisis by leveraging its scale and reach across markets to reach its sustainability goals, suppress waste pollution, and reduce its carbon footprint.

"Sustainability is core to our business strategy and focuses on the interconnection between water, packaging, and climate. To realise these goals, we invest in solutions and partnerships across industry, governments, and society.

"By 2030, Coca-Cola's manufacturing facilities, that we designate as high priority leadership locations, we will reduce, reuse, recycle and replenish the water used in operations in the local correlated watersheds for beneficial social, economic and/or uses by other stakeholders and nature," says Babongile Mandela, director of public affairs, communication and sustainability at Coca-Cola.

Collection

In South Africa, Coca-Cola is a member of the PET Recycling Company (Petco), an extended producer responsibility (EPR) organisation for PET, since 2004 to support collection.



Babongile Mandela, director of Public Affairs, Communication & Sustainability at The Coca-Cola Company



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The partnership and membership in Petco create economic opportunities by supporting the recycling sector to increase collection efforts and divert packaging waste from landfills.



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Petco's published 2022 Annual Report identifies the collection and recycling rates for the products its members have registered with the organisation. That includes Coca-Cola.

The report shows that 121,369 tonnes of packaging was placed on the market by all Petco members in 2022. Of this, 83,967 tonnes (69%) of post-consumer packaging were collected for recycling, and 79,571 tonnes were recycled – achieving a 66% recycling rate. According to the Waste Pickers Association, South Africa has approximately 90,000 informal waste pickers who play an increasingly important role in waste management.

Design

Coca-Cola's vision to create a circular economy for its packaging materials requires 'designing out' waste by harnessing the inherent value of recyclable materials.

Encouraging the consumer to play their part remains a challenge.

For example, in South Africa, their bottling partner, Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa (CCBSA), has introduced a 2-litre returnable/refillable PET - RefPET - bottle in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, North West, Mpumalanga, and parts of the Free State.

This was extended into KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) – saving landfill space, reducing the use of virgin PET and saving consumers money.



Image supplied by PETCO

Bottling partner Coca-Cola Peninsula Beverages (CCPB) in the Western Cape has used returnable/refillable PET bottles since introducing the 1.5-litre pack in 1992.

CCPB has invested in a returnable glass bottle (RGB) line and introduced 300ml and 500ml bottles. CCPB supplies 1.5l returnable/refillable PET bottles in 11 flavours, while RGB bottles are available in numerous flavours.

Partnerships

Achieving a World Without Waste cannot be done alone. “We work with stakeholders, nonprofits, communities, governments and our industry toward a clean environment,” says Mandela.

“Our partnership and membership in Petco create economic opportunities by supporting the recycling sector to increase collection efforts and divert packaging waste from landfills”.



Image supplied by PETCO

“Strategic partnerships will help us achieve our World Without Waste ambitions. Developing a robust recycling industry is essential for a circular economy to succeed,” notes Mandela.

Promoting a circular economy around packaging is a fundamental aspect of Coca-Cola's collective journey towards a

World Without Waste. To succeed, it needs a widespread conversation on this and action on initiatives that align with the circular economy principles.

The global conversation on plastic pollution is growing, and this increased awareness among consumers is helping to accelerate change. Partners play a crucial role in advancing these goals through community clean-up projects and investment in infrastructure that supports waste collection.

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