

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /  
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee  
Bil drafft Diogelu'r Amgylchedd (Cynhyrchion Plastig Untro) (Cymru)/  
Draft Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products)(Wales) Bill  
SUP\_20  
Ymateb gan / Evidence from Kimberley Clark



## **Welsh Senedd Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee – Draft Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Bill**

### **About Kimberly-Clark and our Welsh footprint**

Kimberly-Clark and its trusted brands are an indispensable part of life for people in more than 175 countries, including the UK. Our 46,000 employees around the world, including over 1,200 in the UK with sites in Flint, Barrow and Northfleet, create products that support people's most essential needs, from personal care to consumer tissue.

Our leading and iconic brands include Andrex<sup>®</sup>, Kleenex<sup>®</sup> and Huggies<sup>®</sup>, with our Huggies<sup>®</sup> Baby Wipes manufactured at our site in Flint, Wales, where we employ 128 local people and several apprentices. We are proud to have been investing in this site since 1980. In 2021, we invested almost £5mn in the Flint mill to begin the transition towards producing only 100% plastic-free wet wipes, as well as to increase capacity to support growing demand for Biodegradable Huggies<sup>®</sup> Baby Wipes and Kleenex<sup>®</sup> Hands and Face Wipes, which are exported across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

As a business, we are committed to selling only 100% plastic-free consumer wet wipes in the UK by 2025, and our intent is to produce them at our Flint site. We have put in place an aggressive plan, fuelled by significant investment and innovation, to achieve this and ensure our wipes remain effective and affordable for families all over the world. It's an ambitious target, but we are confident that with a pro-innovation regulatory framework in place, we will get there. We plan to put our Flint mill at the centre of our plastic-free wipes production going forward by upgrading existing machinery and installing new machinery at a cost of \$30-60mn.

We are driven to provide the best for our consumers, our customers, and the communities in which we work and live, all while minimising the impact on our planet. We aspire to be at the forefront of the transition to a circular economy – contributing to human and ecosystem health by reducing waste, ensuring the proper management of post-consumer waste and innovating new ways of giving consumers the products they need.

Our [Plastics Footprint](#) programme sits at the heart of our efforts to do this. It outlines some of our industry-leading commitments in this space, including making 100% of our packaging reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025, reducing our use of new fossil fuel-based plastics by 50% by 2030, and ensuring that 75% of the materials in our products are either biodegradable or recovered and recycled by 2030. We are also part of the [WRAP UK Plastics Pact](#), a collaborative effort between industry, NGOs and government to tackle the problem of plastic waste and create a circular

## economy. **Our response to the draft Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Bill**

As a business, we support the Welsh Government's ambitions to tackle single-use plastic pollution and drive forward legislation that enhances and protects the environment. As such, we welcome the Government's current proposals as laid out in the draft Bill, in particular their recognition that wet wipes containing plastic should not be included at this stage. However, we do understand the Government's interest in undertaking further work to address this issue and welcome the opportunity to continue to support in any way we can.

At Kimberly-Clark, we believe the most effective way to address plastic waste in the environment is through product and packaging innovation and the implementation of circular systems. We have committed to phase out plastic from our Huggies® Baby Wipes in the UK by 2025 and are working hard to make our Kleenex® Water Fresh Wipes and Kleenex® Anti-bacterial Wipes plastic-free by early 2023, with our Andrex® Washlets™ portfolio already containing 0% plastic. It is therefore expected that plastic materials will no longer play a part in any Kimberly-Clark consumer wet wipe products by 2025 as a result of our innovation.

Over the last two years, we have removed 359 tonnes of plastic from our total baby wipes portfolio due to product development, and we have recently launched a new range of Huggies® Natural Wipes, which are plastic-free and made with 100% naturally derived fibres, making them the brand's first biodegradable product.

Kimberly-Clark is also voluntarily introducing new, improved, and prominent front-of-pack labelling consistent with the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUPD) across all our consumer wipes sold in the UK starting in August 2022. As a result, every consumer wet wipe sold in the UK, whether or not it contains plastic, will be labelled as flushable or do not flush with prominent front-of-pack labelling by the end of 2022. We believe, however, given the fact that non-flushable wipes are still often being flushed by consumers, that mandatory front-of-pack labelling for consumer wet wipes containing plastic should be introduced on an industry-wide basis to ensure the consumer is clearly informed about proper wet wipe disposal. If the information on packaging was made consistent and clearer, similar to the labelling requirements in the EU SUPD, we are confident that this would lead to a notable change in consumer behaviour towards disposing non-flushable wipes.

Where possible, any future labelling requirements in Wales should be consistent with the EU SUPD to help drive down manufacturing and consumer costs and support cross-border trade, as well as encourage recognition and compliance. At a minimum, products labelled in compliance with the EU SUPD should be able to circulate freely in the UK.

Furthermore, while improperly flushed wet wipes are found in sewers it is important to note that they have been misidentified as the cause of sewer blockages and overflows. Available research and evidence has established that Fats, Oils and Grease (FOG) deposits (i.e., fatbergs) are the primary source of blockages in the UK, independent from wet wipes of any kind, including those that contain plastic, and that both FOG deposits and hydrologic impacts from precipitation are the cause of a significant number of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs), not wet wipes. The extensive research and evidence that supports this argument can be shared on request.

As a result, the primary consideration for wet wipes remains proper disposal and labelling, regardless of their composition. If labelled and disposed of correctly, wet wipes of all compositions are appropriate for use across the UK.

To support sustainable innovation and investment in Wales, it is crucial that the Government allows industry the time to deliver on its commitments to remove plastic from wet wipes by the end of 2025. We would also welcome greater certainty for business by ensuring alignment with other UK nations regarding single-use plastic policies, and reasonable timeframes in which to be notified of and prepare for any changes.