

Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2026

Prelims: Current events of national importance | Environment & Policy

Why in News?

Recently, Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2026 introduced new mandates on recycled content in plastic packaging and altering compliance provisions.

Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules, 2016

- It is India's first comprehensive framework for plastic regulation, introduced by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- **Key provisions (2016)** - Ban on plastic carry bags ***below 50 microns***, responsibility of local bodies for collection, introduction of (EPR).

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Regime (2022)

- Obligated producers, importers, and brand owners (PIBOs) to collect and recycle plastic equivalent to
 - 35% of baseline in 2021-22.
 - 70% in 2022-23.
 - 100% by 2024-25.
- **Objective** - Reduce plastic waste in landfills, rivers, oceans, and public spaces by making producers responsible for end-of-life management.

Key Amendments, 2026

- **Mandatory Recycled Content** -
- **Old** - Focus only on collection/recycling volume.
- **New** - **Mandatory recycled plastic** in new packaging.
- **Target** - Category I (Rigid Plastic) requires 30% recycled content in 2026-27, rising to 60% by 2028-29.

The 2026 amendment tightened obligations for Category I (rigid plastics), while keeping reuse and collection focus for Categories II &

III, and reinforcing certification for Category IV.

• Rigid Plastic (Category I) - Recycled content mandate (30% → 60%).
• Flexible Plastic (Category II) - Reuse/recycling obligations, no strict recycled-content mandate.
• Multilayered Plastic (Category III) - Collection and reuse focus, substitution encouraged.
• Compostable Plastic (Category IV) - Must be CPCB-certified.

- **New Reuse Targets** - For the first time, specific reuse targets are set for rigid packaging, such as a 70% reuse target for large drinking water containers ($\geq 4.9\text{L}$) in 2025-26, eventually reaching 85%.
- **Elastic Compliance (Shortfall Carry-forward)** -
- **Old** - Fixed annual targets; failure led to immediate penalties (Environmental Compensation).
- **New** - Shortfalls in 2025-26 can be *carried forward for 3 years*.
- **Rule** - Companies must clear at least 33% of the deficit annually until 2028-29.
- **Shift in EPR Focus** -
- **Old** - 100% collection target by 2024-25.
- **New** - Pivot toward reuse obligations; no new collection targets beyond 2025, *prioritizing circularity over raw collection volume*.
- **Category-Specific Rigour** - *Tightened reuse percentage requirements specifically for Category I (Rigid Plastic) to prevent single-use disposal and ensure durability in supply chains*.
- **Enhanced Verification** - Compliance with Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) can now be audited by Registered Environment Auditors, creating a more transparent and accessible verification pool than just designated agencies.
- **Digital Traceability** - ***Mandatory QR codes or barcodes*** on all plastic packaging are required to help regulators and consumers verify the origin and recycled content of the material.
- **Exemptions and Enforcement**
 - **Safety Standards** - Recycled content mandates do not apply to packaging where its use is prohibited by other laws, such as FSSAI standards for sensitive food or medical applications.
 - **Decentralised Authority** - Enforcement is now explicitly given to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), Gram Panchayats, and District-level Panchayats, making ground-level implementation more robust.

Reference

[The Hindu | Plastic Waste Management](#)

