Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2026

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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 (≥4.9L) 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]