NHS Supply Chain

Buying Guide

Catering Consumables and Equipment

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NHS Supply Chain: Facilities and Office Solutions

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Introduction to choosing the right disposable product for your waste streams

Introduction

This document is intended to provide additional information to customers purchasing disposable catering consumables based on available waste streams within trusts.

Departments/stakeholders for engagement

- NHS Procurement teams
- Catering Managers and teams
- Estates and Facilities
- Waste Managers.

Opportunity

Customers are purchasing catering consumable products without considering waste streams that are available in their trust.

This can lead to recyclable/compostable products being disposed of in waste to energy routes when that was not their intended end of life route. In some instances, customers can see a financial impact when purchasing higher cost products which are purchased with good intent, however, the sustainability benefit is not realised.

Choosing the correct waste route for your catering consumables can help reduce carbon emissions. When recyclable and compostable products are disposed of correctly, materials can be recycled or composted as intended, reducing the need for virgin raw materials, preventing contamination of waste streams, and avoiding landfill emissions. This supports both circular economy principles and NHS net zero ambitions.

Key message for trusts

- Understand what waste routes are available in your trust.
- Where applicable, select the correct type of products for your available waste routes.

- If in doubt, speak to your waste provider for more information, including how best to dispose of contaminated products which would otherwise be recyclable/compostable.
- Review the intended use of a product – are you purchasing something that is over specified?
- Question whether you are paying a higher cost for a sustainable product for which you do not have the appropriate disposal route to realise the sustainability benefit.

Additional support

For further information or support relating to the content of this buying guide, please contact: facilitiesandofficesolutionssupport@supplychain.nhs.uk

Consider reduction before product selection

Consider reduction first

Before reviewing product options, consider whether the requirement can be reduced altogether. This may involve avoiding unnecessary use, removing over-specified products, or introducing reusable alternatives where operationally appropriate.

Where single-use products remain necessary, product selection should be aligned with the waste management routes available within your trust to maximise environmental and financial benefits.

Key considerations:

- Reduce – can product use be reduced or avoided altogether?
- Review specification – is a lower-specification product suitable for the intended application?
- Reuse – is a reusable option operationally practical, including the use of reuse schemes?
- Select single-use products carefully – if a disposable product is required, choose one that aligns with your trust's available waste management infrastructure.

Understanding your trust's waste routes

Available waste routes

Before selecting any disposable catering consumables, consider the **waste streams available within your trust**. Choosing products that align with your existing disposal routes can help maximise recycling and recovery opportunities, reduce waste contamination, and support your sustainability objectives. Understanding what can

be collected and processed locally is an important step in selecting the most appropriate product.

The waste routes for the disposable catering consumables referred to within this document are:

- Polypropylene recycling facilities
- National Cup Recycling Scheme (NCRS)
- Industrial composting facilities
- General waste (landfill/energy from waste/incineration).

Benefits of correct disposal

By understanding your available waste routes before selecting products, you can:

- Increase the likelihood that products are disposed of correctly.
- Reduce waste sent to landfill or energy recovery.
- Support local sustainability and net zero initiatives.
- Make informed purchasing decisions based on both environmental impact and cost.
- Ensure products deliver their intended environmental benefits at end of life.

Implications of incorrect disposal

To obtain the environmental benefit of a recyclable/compostable item, the product must be placed in the correct waste stream.

Putting products into the wrong waste stream can prevent them from being recycled or composted, meaning valuable materials are lost and more waste is sent for energy recovery or landfill.

Selecting products that align with your available waste streams is important for achieving sustainability and carbon reduction goals. Recyclable or compostable products that are disposed of incorrectly may lose their environmental benefits, resulting in higher carbon emissions and reduced resource recovery.

Key considerations:

- Which of these waste streams are available for you to use in your trust?
- Are you purchasing the correct product types for your available waste streams?

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Available disposable catering consumables

Question: Which disposable catering consumable materials are available?

The information below will support informed purchasing decisions by helping customers understand:

- An overview of disposable catering products available.
- The materials available for each product type.
- The most intended disposal route at end of life.
- Whether the product aligns with their organisation's waste management infrastructure.

Product Material	Waste Route	Comments	Food Packaging (Boxes and Sandwich Packaging)	Soup Containers	Portion Pots	Disposable Plates & Bowls	Disposable Cold Cups	Disposable Hot Cups	Disposable Cup Lids
Polypropylene (PP) & other recyclable plastic materials	Plastic Recycling	-	✓		✓		✓		✓
Polystyrene (PS)	Domestic Waste	-						✓	✓
Polyethylene (PE) Lined Paper/Card Cups	National Cup Recycling Scheme	-					✓	✓	
Polylactic Acid (PLA)/ Crystallised Polylactic Acid (CPLA)	Industrial Composting	Please check whether your industrial composting waste provider can accept contaminated products.					✓		✓
PLA Lined Paper/Card	Industrial Composting			✓	✓			✓	
Bagasse	Industrial Composting	Paper/card food packaging products may have linings. Please check the disposal route with your waste provider.	✓			✓			
Paper/Card Food Packaging **	Industrial Composting		✓	✓	✓	✓			

Please note: The table above provides guidance only. Product availability varies by material and range. Whilst certain products may be available in a preferred material, associated matching items such as cup lids or accessories may not always be available in the preferred materials. Other ranges of disposable consumables are available, including sandwich packaging – please speak to the Facilities and Office Solutions team for more information if required - facilitiesandofficesolutionssupport@supplychain.nhs.uk

Key considerations:

- The most suitable product is often the one that meets your operational requirements and can be effectively processed through the waste routes available at your organisation.
- If you are unsure on any products and their intended waste route, please contact your waste provider for more information.

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Selecting the most appropriate products based on your waste streams

Question: What product types should I use based on my waste stream?

The diagram below provides guidance on the most appropriate products to purchase based on the waste streams available within your organisation across:

- Disposable cups and lids
- Disposable cup accessories
- Food packaging and bags.



Please note: Generally contaminated products such as bagasse and paper require disposal in general waste. Customers are advised to confirm with their waste provider on the recyclability/composting ability of contaminated products.

Key considerations:

- Are you using the correct types of products based on your waste streams?

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Disposable cups – are you using the right type?

Disposable cup vs waste route

Disposable hot cups are the highest selling consumable on the framework, with five cup types available. Each with its own end-of-life waste route:

- Industrial composting
- Plastic recycling
- National Cup Recycling Scheme (NCRS)**
- General waste (landfill/energy from waste/incineration).



Key considerations:

- Do you have any of these recycling routes available to use these products?
- Does moving away from polypropylene deliver environmental benefits if the products are already being collected and recycled effectively?
- Would you consider implementing the National Cup Recycling Scheme within your trust?

** The National Cup Recycling Scheme (NCRS) is an initiative that helps businesses and consumers recycle disposable paper cups. The paper is separated from the plastic lining, and the wastepaper is turned into new paper products. Please use the following link for more information: https://www.cuprecyclingscheme.co.uk/?trk=test

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Disposable cup vs Intended use

Question: Are you using the right cup for the drink being served?

Selecting the correct cup for its intended use helps ensure product performance, provides the best user experience, and can deliver better value for money.

Customers may be using cups that are over-specified for their application, resulting in higher costs and reduced recycling opportunities. The diagram below provides guidance on selecting the most appropriate cup type based on the beverage being served (non-compostable only).



Key Considerations:

- Do you require a vending/dispensing cup?
- What type of drinks are being served – Is the cup being used over specified for the intended use?
- A polypropylene cup may be more cost-effective and more readily recyclable for cold water drinks.
- Choosing the right cup for the intended application can help reduce unnecessary costs, minimise waste, and support your Trust's sustainability objectives.

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Compostable products: Is your waste infrastructure ready?

Question: Are you paying more for a compostable item without having access to industrial composting?

Compostable catering consumables are often more expensive than conventional alternatives. However, if these products are not collected through an appropriate industrial composting waste stream, the additional cost may not deliver the intended environmental benefits.

In many cases, compostable products disposed of through general waste are sent for energy recovery alongside non-compostable materials, meaning their compostable properties are voided.

Before selecting compostable products, customers should consider whether their trust has access to a suitable waste collection service and whether the waste provider accepts compostable packaging and food-contaminated items. Without the appropriate infrastructure, trusts may pay a premium for compostable products while missing opportunities to maximise recycling, reduce waste and support their sustainability objectives.

Potential drawbacks where suitable waste streams are unavailable include:

- Higher purchase costs compared with other alternatives.
- Intended environmental benefits may not be fully realised.
- Risk of contamination if compostable products are placed in recycling streams.
- Additional staff training, communication and waste segregation requirements.
- Potential confusion for users when multiple disposal routes are available.
- Missed opportunities to utilise recyclable products where robust recycling infrastructure already exists.

Key considerations:

- Does your trust have a dedicated waste stream for compostable catering consumables?
- Does your waste provider accept compostable packaging and food-contaminated compostable items?
- Are staff and end users aware of the correct disposal route?
- Are you paying a premium for compostable products without having the infrastructure required to realise their intended benefits?

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Acronyms

These acronyms are/may be referenced in the above Buying Guide -

Acronym	Full Name	Product Examples
PS	Polystyrene	Disposable Hot Cups
PP	Polypropylene	Clear and White Disposable Cold Cups Sandwich & Food Packaging
PET	Polyethylene Terephthalate	Food Packaging
rPET	Recycled Polyethylene Terephthalate	Food Packaging Food Packaging Lids
PE	Polyethylene	PE Lined Paper Disposable Hot Cups
PLA	Polylactic Acid	Compostable Clear Disposable Cold Cups PLA Lined Disposable Paper Hot Cups
CPLA	Crystallised Polylactic Acid	Compostable Disposable Cold Cups
NCRS	National Cup Recycling Scheme	Cup Recycling Scheme

Product listing

The link below provides access to the Catering Consumables and Equipment product listing:

www.supplychain.nhs.uk/catering-equipment

Please note that this information was accurate at the time of publication and may change over time.

Base descriptions

Use the below table to help you search for disposable consumables on our online catalogue:

Product Area	Base Description
Disposable cups	Disposable hot cup
	Disposable cold cup
Lids for disposable cold and hot cups	Disposable cup lids
Food packaging and associated lids	Lid for disposable food packaging foil
	Disposable food packaging foil
	Disposable food packaging card and paper
	Lid for disposable food packaging card and paper
	Disposable food packaging bagasse
	Disposable food packaging foam
	Soup container
	Lid for soup container
	Disposable portion pot polypropylene
	Disposable portion pot lid
	Disposable portion pot paper
	Sandwich packaging
Plates and bowls	Disposable bowl
	Disposable plate
Cutlery	Disposable knife
	Disposable fork
	Disposable spoon
	Disposable teaspoon
	Disposable cutlery