

Ban on single-use restaurant tableware hailed as fast-food ‘revolution’ in France

Fast-food chains in France are preparing for one of the biggest changes to their restaurants in decades as the government bans disposable plates, cups and tableware for anyone eating or drinking on-site.

5 Chains such as McDonald’s, Burger King, Starbucks and Subway are facing what environmentalists have called a “revolution” on 1 January as pioneering new measures come into force in France to combat waste. (...)

10 Under the new rules, any restaurant with more than 20 seats – including work canteens, bakery chains, fast-food and sushi outlets – will have to provide reusable, washable cups, plates, dishes and cutlery for customers eating in. French environmental groups called it a “complete paradigm shift” for the sector.

The roughly 30,000 fast-food outlets in France serve 6bn meals a year, generating an estimated 180,000 tonnes of waste. Environmental groups said 55% of that was generated by people eating in.

15 “We’re extremely happy that this is finally coming into force,” said Alice Elfassi, head of legal affairs for the NGO Zero Waste France, which pushed for the measure in a law that was published in 2020 but gave companies until 2023 to prepare. “Fast food is a sector that produces a lot of waste. Although single-use plastic had already been banned, it had been replaced by large amounts of throwaway products like cardboard, wood, bamboo, which we consider an unacceptable waste of resources. Most fast-food
20 restaurants won’t switch to classic, long-wearing glass or china that lasts years, they will opt for hard plastic and we have concerns about its durability – will it withstand hundreds of washes or will it be thrown out after only a few? We’ll be vigilant on that.” (...)

25 Several McDonald’s stores have recently put in place reusable plastic containers for fries, shaped to look exactly like the company’s traditional red disposable packaging. Burger King has trialled reusable bowls and cups with the company’s logo.

The challenge for many fast-food restaurants has been to find space to put in dishwasher facilities to clean the cups and plates, and also deploy staff to stop customers throwing them away or taking them home. Some young customers said they
30 worried reusable cups wouldn’t be clean and preferred to get takeaway.