

So long plastic air pillows: Amazon shifting to recycled paper filling for packages in North America

June 20 2024, by Michelle Chapman



The Amazon logo is seen, June 15, 2023, at the Vivatech show in Paris. Amazon is moving from putting plastic air pillows in its packages to using recycled paper filling instead, a move that's more environmentally friendly and secures items in boxes better. The company said Thursday, June 20, 2024 that it's already replaced 95% of the plastic air fillers with paper filler in North America and is working toward complete removal by year's end. Credit: AP Photo/Michel Euler, File

[Amazon](#) is shifting from the plastic air pillows used for packaging in North America to recycled paper because it's more environmentally sound, and it says paper just works better.

The company said Thursday that it's already replaced 95% of the plastic air pillows with paper filler in North America and is working toward complete removal by year's end.

"We want to ensure that customers receive their items undamaged, while using as little packaging as possible to avoid waste, and prioritizing recyclable materials," Amazon said.

It is the company's largest plastic packaging reduction effort in North America to date and will remove almost 15 billion plastic air pillows from use annually.

Almost all customer deliveries for Prime Day this year, which happens next month, will contain plastic no air pillows, according to Amazon.

The e-commerce giant has faced years of criticism about its use of plastic from environmental groups, including a nonprofit called Oceana, which has been releasing its own reports on Amazon's use of plastic packaging.

Matt Littlejohn, senior vice president of strategic initiatives at Oceana, said that Amazon's efforts to reduce plastic packaging is welcome news, but that there's still more that the company can do.

"While this is a significant step forward for the company, Amazon needs to build on this momentum and fulfill its multiyear commitment to transition its North America fulfillment centers away from plastic,"

Littlejohn said in a prepared statement. "Then, the company should expand these efforts and also push innovations like reusable packaging to move away from single-use packaging everywhere it sells and ships."

There has also been broad support among Amazon investors who have urged the company to outline how will will reduce waste.

The company disclosed the total of single-use plastic across global operations for the first time in 2022 after investors sought more details on plans to reduce waste. The company said that it used 85,916 metric tons of single-use plastic that year, an 11.6% decrease from 2021.

Amazon began transition away from plastic air pillows in October at an automated fulfillment center in Ohio. The company said that it was able to test and learn at the center there, which helped it move quickly on transitioning to recycled paper filling.

The transition process included changing out machinery and training employees on new systems and machines.

Amazon discovered through testing that the paper filler, which is made from 100% recyclable content and is curbside recyclable, offers the same, if not better protection during shipping compared with plastic air pillows, the company said.

Christian Garcia, who works at Amazon's fulfillment center in Bakersfield, California, said in a release that the paper filler is easier to work with and that the machinery gives staff more space so that it's easier to pack orders.

Ongoing efforts to reduce waste include a campaign to ship items without any additional packaging, the company said. In 2022, 11% of all of Amazon's packages shipped worldwide were without added delivery

packaging.

Other efforts include piloting new technology with artificial intelligence and robotics company Glacier to use AI-powered robots to automate the sorting of recyclables and collect real-time data on recycling streams for companies. It's also partnering with the U.S. Department of Energy on new materials and recycling programs.

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Citation: So long plastic air pillows: Amazon shifting to recycled paper filling for packages in North America (2024, June 20) retrieved 25 June 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-06-plastic-air-pillows-amazon-shifting.html>

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