CCES 2025 Session Summary

Circular Breakfast for Friends & Allies of the Circular Plastics Taskforce (CPT)

During this in-person networking breakfast event, the Circular Plastics Taskforce (CPT) and partners shared highlights from their upcoming projects and exciting news about its future endeavours. Hosted by **Marie-Anne Champoux-Guimond**, Senior Manager of Sustainability at Keurig Dr. Pepper Canada, the panel featured:

- **Sam Baker**, Executive Director, Recycle BC & SK Recycles
- **Pierre Benabidès**, Conseiller senior, GAPC / Lichens
- **Baltej Gill**, VP, Data Management & Program Delivery, Circular Materials
- **Erik Grisé**, Director, Circular Economy Development, Cascades

Link to Slide Deck

Date / Location: Wednesday, April 16, 2025 / Montreal, Canada

This engaging session put plastic circularity at the forefront of dynamic exchanges between leaders from across Canada.

SUMMARY

The Circular Plastics Taskforce (CPT) breakfast session at CCES 2025 highlighted the organization's significant strides in fostering a circular economy for plastics in Canada since its inception in 2020. The session, hosted by Keurig Dr Pepper Canada (KDP Canada), a co-founder of the CPT, emphasized the collaborative and impactful initiatives undertaken to address plastics recycling challenges.

CPT's Vision and Evolution

Marie-Anne Champoux-Guimond of KDP Canada opened the session by underscoring the CPT's origins as a "labor of friendship" among like-minded organizations committed to finding concrete solutions for plastics recycling. The CPT's core vision is to ensure that all post-consumer plastic packaging in Canada can be effectively collected, sorted, and recycled to create a robust circular economy.

Initially founded by Cascades Impact Canada, the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada, Éco Entreprises Québec (ÉEQ), and KDP Canada, the CPT recently expanded its membership base to increase its reach and impact. A major announcement during the session was the official welcoming of two new members: Recycle BC and Circular Materials. This expansion is crucial for supporting the growth of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in Canada and implementing high-performing recycling systems nationwide. The new members bring a pan-Canadian presence and diverse market experiences, significantly strengthening the CPT's ability to achieve its objectives.

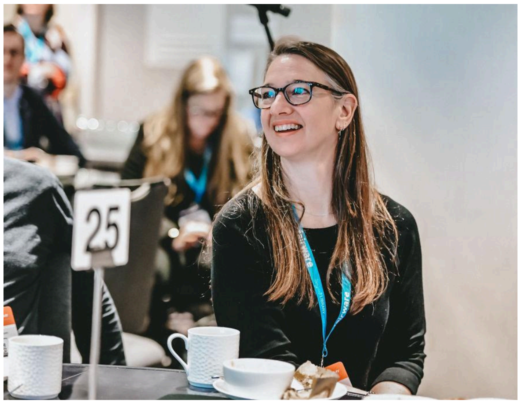
Project Portfolio: Addressing the "Orphans of the Bin"

The CPT focuses on plastic resins and formats that are particularly challenging to sort or recycle, affectionately dubbed the "orphans of the bin." The session provided an overview of both completed and ongoing projects:

Completed Projects:

- **PET Thermoforms:** This project aimed to understand how recyclers could effectively process bales with a higher proportion of PET thermoforms. A white paper published from this initiative concluded that well-designed PET thermoform packaging is recyclable and likely recycled in Canada, challenging previous misconceptions. Future plans include assessing the recyclability of various thermoform samples divided by industry type to provide specific design recommendations.
- **Flexible Plastic Packaging (PRFLEX & Digital Watermarking):** Recognizing the significant challenge of flexible plastics, the CPT explored what an ideal recycling system for these materials would entail. They also investigated the potential of digital watermarking to optimize the sorting of films and flexibles and compared different traceability systems.
- **Compliance Mechanisms for Food-Grade Recycled**

Plastic Resins: This research project examined best practices for verifying food safety in recycled plastics, highlighting the differences between mandatory European regulations and the voluntary processes in North America. This foundational work directly led to the current food-grade recycled polypropylene project.



Ongoing Initiatives:

- **Optimization of Small Plastic Items:** This new project, undertaken in partnership with Circular Materials and ÉEQ, aims to improve the sortation of small plastic items, which often fall through the cracks of current recycling systems. The initial steps involve analyzing different recycling facilities to understand the magnitude of the issue and determining a clear definition of "small items." The project seeks to leverage learnings from similar initiatives in the US to develop solutions applicable to the Canadian context.
- **Increasing Food-Grade Recycled Polypropylene (Project LEAP - working title):** Building on the insights from the compliance mechanisms project, this initiative addresses the limited supply of food-grade recycled polypropylene. The goal is to explore whether curbside recycling feedstock can be effectively converted back into food-grade applications, prioritizing food safety. Key challenges include understanding the composition of the current polypropylene stream and identifying investment needs in decontamination technologies.
- **BiblioFlex:** This project, with significant involvement from Recycle BC, focuses on creating a comprehensive "library" of packaging by better understanding the composition of films and flexibles. By identifying problematic elements like specific inks or layers, the CPT aims to inform better design practices and ultimately improve the recyclability and value of this material stream.

Panel Discussion: Perspectives on the Road Ahead

The session included a dynamic panel featuring key stakeholders, including the newly appointed CPT board members and long-standing partners.

Sam Baker and Baltej Gill articulated their organizations' reasons for joining the CPT. Both emphasized the value of collaborative research to stretch resources, unify approaches, and support shared initiatives. Baltej highlighted Circular Materials' experience across diverse markets (Ontario, Alberta, Yukon, East Provinces) as a unique contribution, while Sam underscored Recycle BC's nearly 11 years of operating a full producer responsibility program, offering invaluable insights into resident interaction and the evolving needs of a mature program.

Erik Grisé from Cascades provided a manufacturer's perspective, identifying access to good quality post-consumer resin (PCR) and quality consistency as primary challenges for plastics recycling in Canada. He expressed hope that EPR initiatives would increase recovery rates, stimulate investment in processing capacities, and improve feedstock quality through better design for recyclability. Erik further elaborated on the PET Thermoform project, stressing the importance of better communication across the value chain to standardize packaging design and dispel misconceptions about recyclability.

Pierre Benabidès elaborated on the food-grade recycled polypropylene project, highlighting the crucial difference between the mature PET and HDPE markets and the less developed polypropylene market for food-grade applications. He explained that while technology for recycling polypropylene into food-grade exists, the limited supply from curbside recycling—due to a mix of food and non-food grade products—is a significant hurdle. He emphasized the need to understand the PP stream's composition better and the importance of collaboration among Producers Responsibility Organizations (PROs), Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs), and recyclers, alongside investments in decontamination technologies.

Sam further discussed the films and flexibles collection at Recycle BC, which has been ongoing since 2017. He pointed out the varied composition of this material as one of its biggest challenges. The BiblioFlex project aims to address this by working upstream to harmonize material composition and identify problematic elements within the stream, thereby raising the commodity's value. The project involves creating a "library" of plastic packaging through detailed lab testing to provide market segment data for better design and recycling.

Baltej introduced the project on small plastic items, emphasizing the need to understand the magnitude of this issue for effective investment in sorting technologies. The project will analyze what happens to small items in different types of facilities and leverage international research to develop solutions applicable to the Canadian system.

Q&A and Audience Discussion

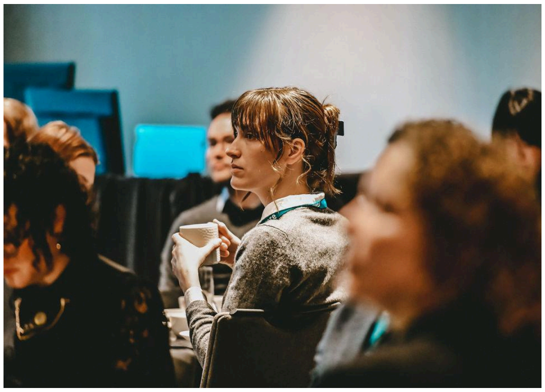
The session included a Q&A segment that addressed critical issues and provided valuable insights:

- **Compostable Packaging:** In response to a question about compostable packaging, it was clarified that while important, the CPT's current focus is primarily on the recyclability of plastics. Compostable packaging, ideally, should not enter the MRF stream, which is the CPT's focus. The Organic Matter Recycling Regulation in British Columbia does not allow packaging in composting facilities.
- **PE Flexible vs. Rigid:** The LEAP food-grade recycled polypropylene project focuses on rigid PE. The BiblioFlex project analyzes flexible PE to determine its presence in the recycling stream.
- **Sharing Learnings:** The CPT emphasizes sharing its findings widely through reports, communication materials, and partnerships with organizations like the Association of Plastic Recyclers (APR) and the Canadian Plastics Pact (CPP). The goal is to create design guides and ensure that all stakeholders, including designers and marketers, understand the impact of their decisions on the recycling value chain.

Call to Action and Conclusion

Pascal Lachance, Director of Sustainability for Danone, concluded the session by highlighting two new CPT publications:

- **Food Grade White Paper:** This document addresses the challenges and opportunities of integrating recycled resin in food applications, defining the best approval processes for food-grade recycled resin.
- **PET Thermoform Best Practices Guidebook:** This guide provides best practices for the collection, sorting, and recycling of PET thermoforms, aiming to improve the understanding and handling of this material stream.



Lachance also extended a call for partners to collaborate with the CPT on its innovative projects. Recognizing that collective effort is essential, he encouraged interested organizations to engage with the CPT. Additionally, he announced a vacant seat on the CPT's Board of Directors, inviting suitable organizations to join their mission. The CPT seeks members who are passionate about finding solutions for the recycling industry and are eager to work collaboratively.

The session underscored the CPT's commitment to collaborative action, informed research, and tangible solutions for advancing plastics circularity in Canada, setting a positive tone for the future of the industry.