

MEASURING POSITIVE CHANGE



# THE RESPONSIBLE PLASTIC MANAGEMENT (RPM) STANDARD

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# The Responsible Plastic Management (RPM) Standard

## INTRODUCTION

### Responsible Plastic Management (RPM) Scheme Mission and Vision

RPM is a verification/certification program and third party assurance standard designed to review and promote organizations and initiatives that wish to demonstrate transparency and a measurability about their commitment to Responsible Plastic Management.

Through engagement with the RPM Program organizations can identify, measure, manage and validate their efforts in Responsible Plastic Management to help protect the land, oceans, rivers and water systems from plastic contamination.

Through the RPM Program, organizations will set targets and objectives in defined periods that:

- Reduce the use and quantity of unnecessary plastic in products and process through redesign, innovation or alternative delivery models whilst evaluating any unintended consequences (e.g. compromise to quality, safety, consumer experience)
- Eliminate the use of single use plastics from everyday activities
- Eliminate problem plastics where viable and functional alternatives exist and are available
- Ensure 100% of plastic packaging will be reuseable, recyclable or compostable
- Ensure 70% of plastic will be effectively recycled or composted
- Ensure that there is 30% average recycled content across all plastic packaging
- Positively and proactively network and search for new materials from renewable sources
- Eliminate packaging waste going to landfill
- Get staff engaged in the RPM mission and engaged in community action activity

### The Need for RPM

Plastic pollution is a significant and growing problem globally<sup>1</sup>. Business as usual is causing the plastic demand and the associated pollution crisis. This problem cannot be solved solely by government policy and requires the collective action of all sectors of society. Organizations must take the lead, and they must voluntarily set and deliver on plastic reduction targets and be rewarded and recognised for taking this action. The RPM Standard has been developed to empower **any organization** to start thinking and acting on how plastic is used in their business operation. The reward is Responsible Plastic Management certification and recognition and listing on the RPM Directory.

Plastic is an extremely versatile material with many valuable uses. (For example, in the food sector plastic packaging has had a very positive impact in reducing food waste and improving food safety). The RPM Standard will not prejudice certain types of business over others as some businesses will naturally use more plastic in their operations. RPM Program uses the principles of refuse, replace, reduce, reuse, and recycle. All organizations can start re-thinking how they use plastic and start making improvements to how plastic is managed in their operation.

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<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that 8300 million metric tons (Mt) of virgin plastics have been produced to date; 322 Million Tonnes of 'Plastic' produced per Year; and by 2050 approximately 12 billion tonnes of plastic waste will be in landfills or the natural environment.

Aside from an organization transparently demonstrating their responsibility in plastic use and management, and improving the sustainability of their operations, RPM certification will lead to the following benefits:

- Improvement of public image and positive press coverage
- Improvement of employee and stakeholder relations
- Increase in the attractiveness of business to investors and customers
- Enhancement of reputation
- Improvement of competitiveness
- Ability to counter false claims with facts

The RPM Standard will be reviewed and updated at least every 5 years to reflect on-going advancements in science and technology that will improve the range of options businesses can take to reducing plastic use.

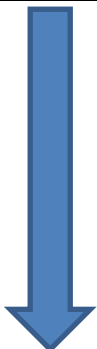
Consumers want the ability to identify and choose products and practices that are environmentally friendly and demonstrate responsible management of plastics. They would like to make choices that avoid products which threaten oceans, wildlife and water sources.

RPM is dedicated to verifying and certifying plastic reduction systems and efforts, plastic reduction claims and responsible plastic management achievements.

### RPM Standard Objectives, Scope and Eligibility

The RPM Standard is open for use by any organization, irrespective of type and size. We encourage any organization to apply, as even an applicant that doesn't meet the full requirements of the RPM Standard at initial audit can demonstrate they are on the journey to positive change in the way they use plastic. Committed applicants can enter the RPM Engagement Register (see Table 1) providing essential compliance criteria are met.

**Table 1** The RPM Improver journey

Member Type	Increasing Requirements	Validity	What this demonstrates
RPM Engagement and Plastic Improver Project		Dependent on business context, and feasibility of achieving full certification	Commitments have been made and improvement plan put in place to achieve eventual RPM Full Certification.
RPM Achiever		Ongoing	Full compliance with RPM, though still room for improvement to demonstrate leadership in all areas.
RPM Leader		Ongoing	Applicant goes above and beyond requirements of RPM demonstrating best practice in all areas, and commitment to continued improvement (including focus on wider societal goals).



## Compliance with Local and National Laws

Applicants to the RPM Standard shall ensure that they are compliant with local and national laws for all aspects of their operation. The RPM Standard encourages applicants to aim to achieve and maintain best practices and continuously drive down the requirements and demand for more plastic production.

## Standard Introduction

The RPM Program is designed to be robust but practical and pragmatic. It is not anti-plastic in its philosophy, it respects the need for a balanced and managed approach. The Program seeks to quickly eliminate avoidable plastic but does not require organizations to have to make quick or rash decisions about reduction and elimination of essential plastic without obvious and tested replacement, reduction and recycling solutions. Verification and Certification is based on the organizations' commitments to the RPM journey and the practical improvements that can be made in a timely and expedient manner.

The RPM Standard is organized into **Three Sections** that cover the five key steps / aspects of a Continuous Improvement Cycle (see Figure 1 below).

The three sections of the RPM Standard are:

1. **General Requirements:** Step 1
2. **Responsible Plastic Management System:** Steps 2 – 4
3. **Communication and Transparency:** Step 5

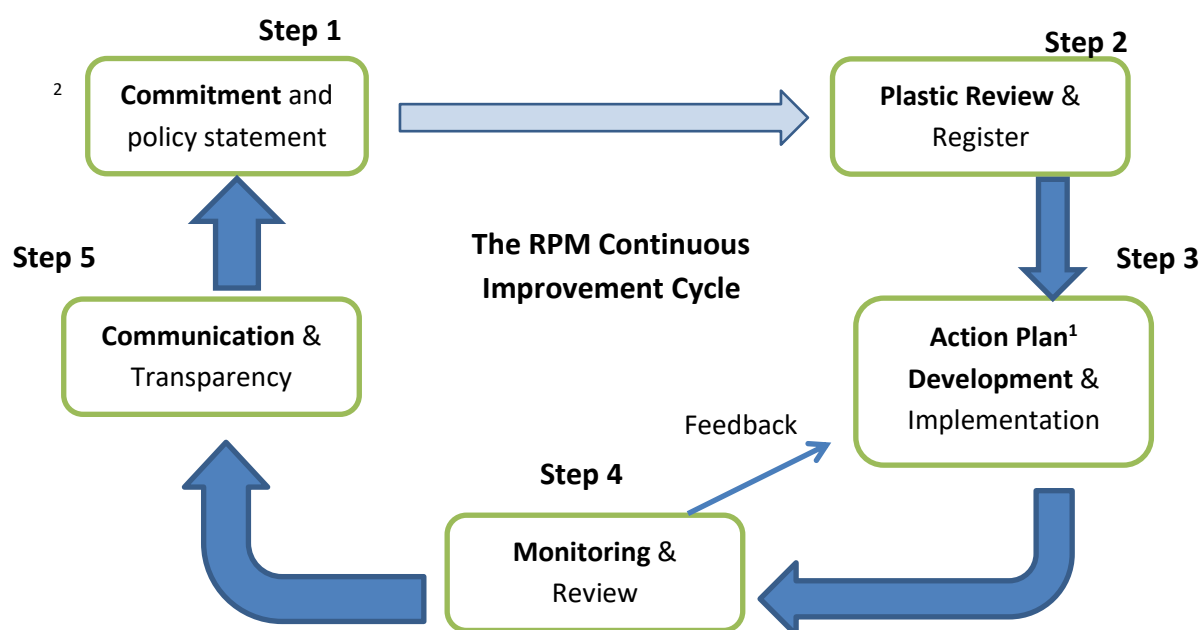
The RPM Standard has been developed by a team of businesses, standard and certification experts with expertise in environmental management standards, ISO certification and sustainability. The RPM Standard is designed to be applicable to all types of organization and it is up to the organization to set the appropriate goals and relevant targets. The validity, relevance and the execution of these goals/targets will then be assessed by independent third party experts. Similar to other assurance initiatives RPM Program requires the organizations' goals to be:

- **Specific** – this could include single use plastic and non-single use plastic
- **Measurable** – the goals need to be tangible to determine progress and success
- **Attainable** – the goals need to be realistic and ambitious
- **Relevant** – the goals must consider all the plastic used within the organization
- **Timely** – the goals should be acted upon with a sense of urgency and determination

Organizations should set a system that is appropriate for the size, scale and type of business. Ambitious but realistic targets should be set involving as many people in the organization as possible. There are many benefits to be gained from reducing plastic in an organization and implementing a positive culture for responsible practices. Organizations can come up with some quick innovative solutions for some quick wins for different areas of the organization:

- Drinking Water Policies
- Canteen/ Lunch Policies
- Stationary Policies
- Packaging Policies
- Purchasing Policies
- Plastic separation, segregation, re-use and recycling Policies

**Figure 1** The RPM Continuous Improvement Cycle: **The Five Key Steps:**



<sup>2</sup> The **Plastics Action Plan** takes a 3-step approach:

- 1) **Reducing use of plastic where possible** and replacing with sensible alternatives (considering the full product life-cycle); where this is not possible,
- 2) **Ensuring plastic is reused and/ or recycled**; and finally if this is not possible
- 3) **Ensuring plastic is disposed responsibly.**

## Amplifying the Impact

Organizations should consider how they can amplify their Responsible Plastic Management impact by asking suppliers and customers to also consider their actions, products and services. They should be made aware of why changes have been made and be given any advice to assist them to be as eco-friendly with associated product and packaging.

## RPM Standard Document

The remainder of this document describes the principles and reasoning behind the Standard and Program and also details the RPM standard criteria that organizations are expected to meet to gain recognition of achievement.

The RPM Standard has been developed against a backdrop of increased public and political scrutiny on plastic waste particularly that involving single use plastics<sup>3</sup>. The following principles inform the approach taken by the RPM Standard.

- a) **Extended Producer Responsibility:** Producer responsibility is about making sure businesses that manufacture, import and sell products are responsible for their end of life environmental impact.
- b) **Circular Economy:** A circular economy is an alternative to a traditional linear economy (make, use, dispose) in which resources are kept in use for as long as possible, maximum value is extracted from them whilst in use, and then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life.
- c) **Consumer Responsibility:** Consumer responsibility is a person taking personal responsibility for the environmental costs and consequences of their consumption patterns and lifestyle.
- d) **Continuous Improvement:** Continuous Improvement is the on-going effort to improve products, services and processes by making small, incremental improvements within a business. It is based on the belief that these incremental changes will add up to major improvements over time and it is as much about tactics (i.e. specific improvements) as it is about changing the culture of the organization to focus on opportunities for improvement rather than problems<sup>4</sup>
- e) **Inclusivity:** The RPM Standard is open to all and not prejudicial to certain types of business operation.

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<sup>3</sup> Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These items are items like plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.

<sup>4</sup> (<https://www.processexcellencenetwork.com/innovation/articles/continuous-improvement-4-factors-that-make-a-conti>)

## THE RPM STANDARD CRITERIA

### SECTION 1: RPM General Requirements

This part of the standard directs the organization to pledge a commitment to Responsible Plastic Management and to engage all necessary team members. All staff shall be made aware of the commitments through the written policies.

#### Sub-section 1.1: Demonstrating Commitment to Plastic Management

- 1.1.1 There shall be evidence of 'management commitment' to the implementation, maintenance and operation of a Responsible Plastic Management System (RPMS).
- 1.1.2 Key components of the RPMS shall include:
  - Management commitment; (named individuals)
  - Team /Staff involvement;
  - Baseline and periodic review;
  - Plastic management policy;
  - Setting of relevant objectives and targets
- 1.1.3 There shall be evidence of 'an understanding' of and commitment to the principles of responsible plastic management by all relevant persons.
- 1.1.4 There shall be evidence of commitment to raising plastic awareness and knowledge throughout the applicants' organization.

#### Sub-section 1.2: Staff Training and Involvement

- 1.2.1 Management shall designate a key member of staff with overall responsibility for the implementation of the RPM standard within the organization. The formation of an RPM team shall be considered where relevant.
- 1.2.2 The designated member of staff shall be able to demonstrate competence in the tasks required to implement this RPM Standard.
- 1.2.3 Key staff shall be aware of the requirements of the RPM Standard and any relevant legislation involvement in the process of plastic management.
- 1.2.4 There shall be provision for staff information and training on plastic issues.

### **Sub-section 1.3: A Plastic Management Policy**

- 1.3.1 A relevant and practical Responsible Plastic Management Policy (commitment statement) shall be established, documented, implemented and maintained.
- 1.3.2 The policy shall be appropriate to reflect the unique nature, scale and plastic use aspects within the operation.
- 1.3.3 The policy shall be communicated to all staff and persons working for or on behalf of the organization ensuring that employees are aware of the applicants' Plastic Management Policy and of their responsibility in this regard and provided with the support and training necessary to achieve it.
- 1.3.4 The policy shall be publicly available.
- 1.3.5 The policy shall establish a framework/basis for setting and reviewing plastic objectives and targets that shall include as a minimum:
  - 1.3.5.1 Respect for the working environment, supporting sustainable development and best business practices;
  - 1.3.5.2 Compliance with applicable legal requirements and any other requirements to which the organization subscribes;
  - 1.3.5.3 Ensuring that employees are aware of the applicants' plastic policy and of their own responsibilities and given the support and training necessary;
  - 1.3.5.4 Working and liaising with government and non-government bodies towards the improvement of the local environment;
  - 1.3.5.5 Engaging and listening to the concerns of customers, employees, neighbours and the wider community;
  - 1.3.5.6 The provision of information to the public necessary to understand the commitment to best plastic practices by the applicant;
  - 1.3.5.7 The assessment of plastic impact of all new activities, practices, products and processes, including an assessment of potential unintended consequences in advance of their adoption;
  - 1.3.5.8 The provision for the access to external information on plastic issues to staff;
  - 1.3.5.9 Prevention of pollution;
  - 1.3.5.10 Application of the best available technology and procedures



## SECTION 2: The Responsible Plastic Management System

This part of the Standard directs the organization to plot and record all the plastic use and to determine what could be changed. This shall include the type, volume, weight and cost of the plastic being used. This shall include all plastic types, e.g. single use plastics, biodegradable plastics and compostable plastics.

### Sub-section 2.1: Baseline Plastic Review (*The Plastic Register*)

2.1.1 Prior to establishing a RPMS, a baseline Plastic Review and Register shall have been carried out and documented to identify all relevant plastic use aspects within the organization.

2.1.2 The review (*Plastic Register*) shall include the following areas:

2.1.2.1 Identification and documenting the types and quantities of plastic received/handled by polymer type, including, as applicable:

Thermoplastics and Thermosets, Elastomers and Synthetic Fibres including (and not limited too):

- Polyethylene Terephthalate (PETE or PET)
- High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE)
- Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)
- Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE)
- Polypropylene (PP)
- Polystyrene or Styrofoam (PS)
- Other Thermoplastics e.g. Polycarbonate, Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene (ABS)
- Thermoset plastics e.g., Polyurethane, Polylactide, Acrylic, Vinyl Ester, Fiberglass, Nylon, Polyester)

2.1.2.2 Identification of *plastic aspects*<sup>5</sup>, including those associated with normal products, operating conditions, abnormal conditions including relevant start up and shut down, and emergency situations and accidents.

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<sup>5</sup> Plastic objects and components in your business premises and associated with business operations (e.g. packaging, transportation) that could potentially become an environmental hazard are defined according to the following categories:

- Mega 1 mtr
- Macro >25mm
- Meso 10-25mm
- Micro 1-5 mm Primary and Secondary Sources (Fragments)
- Nano <100nm
- 1 m 25 mm 1–5 mm Mega Macro Meso Micro Marine litter comes in many sizes Nano ~ 100 nm

- 2.1.2.3 Identification of applicable legal requirements and other requirements to which the organization subscribes relevant to the production, use and life-cycle, disposal or other end of life for plastic.
- 2.1.2.4 Examination of existing plastic management practices and procedures including those associated with procurement and contracting activities.
- 2.1.2.5 Evaluation of previous emergency or alternative situations or environmental accidents.

## **Sub-section 2.2: The Plastics Action Plan**

The organization should now know how much plastic it is using and where the avoidable plastic is. This section directs the organization to plan the targeted reduction of plastic. The time, people and budget shall be committed to implement actions and to achieve targets.

- 2.2.1 The applicant shall establish, document, maintain and continually improve a Responsible Plastic Management System (RPMS) 'Action Plan'.
- 2.2.2 The performance of the RPMS Action Plan shall be periodically internally assessed and at least annually.
- 2.2.3 The applicant shall establish an internal procedure to carry out this periodic review of the RPMS Action Plan.
- 2.2.4 Records of internal reviews and actions shall be maintained.
- 2.2.5 Key plastic objectives and time-bound targets for 1) the reduction and elimination of single use and problem plastics for more sustainable alternatives, and 2) increased use of recycled plastic and improved efficiency of recycling of plastic shall be set within the context of the RPMS Action Plan.

### **2.2.6 Plastic Use Management Plan**

The organization shall:

- 2.2.6.1 Implement a Responsible Plastic Use 'Management Plan' according to the Action Plan and principles of refusal, reduction, reuse, recycling and recovery of plastics.
- 2.2.6.2 Demonstrate commitment to seeking alternatives to single use and non-recyclable choices that allows recycling and re-use methods of plastic.
- 2.2.6.3 Undertake an assessment of any alternative options that includes economic, environmental, regulatory and health & safety analysis comparison.
- 2.2.6.4 Complete a plastic purchase, use and waste review, on an annual basis, recording all plastic handled and its fate according to type, quantity and end destination and maintain the Plastic Register.

## **2.2.7 Plastic Use Reduction and Recycling**

- 2.2.7.1 Methods and targets to reduce plastic consumption and utilise recyclable plastics made with recycled content shall be investigated.
- 2.2.7.2 The applicant shall purchase plastic materials with a long lifespan and/or made from recycled and/or recyclable materials where these are available.
- 2.2.7.3 Single use plastic items and plastic materials that cannot be readily recycled shall be avoided.
- 2.2.7.4 The applicant shall utilise licensed recycling programmes for plastic waste.

## **2.2.8 Waste Disposal**

- 2.2.8.1 The applicant shall ensure separation and segregation of plastic waste into appropriate recycling, compostable, and non-recyclable categories, and keep in a condition sufficient to allow recycling and eliminate end of life environmental impact.
- 2.2.8.2 Plastic Waste shall be disposed of at approved facilities appropriate to the plastic risk category guidelines published by local authorities.
- 2.2.8.3 The applicant shall keep an inventory of proper disposal of decommissioned and scrapped plastic equipment.

## **Sub-section 2.3: Monitoring and Review**

The organization shall determine the monitoring period for progress review. This should be appropriate for the targets and tasks set.

- 2.3.1 The *Plastic Register* shall be reviewed and updated periodically (minimum 6 months) and contain details of the activities and operations under the control of the applicant related to the *plastic use aspects* and against the requirements of this RPM Standard.
- 2.3.2 The review shall include a review of potential plastic impact arising from proposed new activities, products and processes in advance of commencement with respect to relevant *plastic use aspects*.
- 2.3.3 Plastic impacts shall be progressively addressed in the Plastics Action Plan.
- 2.3.4 The applicant shall promptly remove and repair damaged plastic equipment and avoid the accumulation of disused and de-commissioned equipment.

## **SECTION 3: Communication and Transparency**

Organizations that have made progress in plastic reduction and responsible management are encouraged to promote results and success to staff members. This will help with continuous motivation and inspire staff and other parties to continue with responsible plastic management actions.

### **Sub-section 3.1: Periodic Reporting**

- 3.1.1 A report on how effectively the Plastics Action Plan has been implemented shall be made available 1 year after initial implementation, and each year thereafter.
- 3.1.2 The report format shall be clear enough to allow a lay person to scrutinise how effective the organization has been at meeting its targets and expectations.
- 3.1.3 Non achievement of the RPM targets shall be fully documented and reasons given.

### **Sub-section 3.2: Demonstrating Plastics Leadership**

- 3.2.1 Staff shall be encouraged to demonstrate a commitment to Responsible Plastic Management outside of the organization:
  - 3.2.1.1 Where feasible the applicant shall organise or take part in periodic community clean-up operations involving staff and the local community as appropriate.
  - 3.2.1.2 The employer shall provide tips and guidance on how employees can make improvements to reducing, reusing and recycling plastics at home.
- 3.2.2 The applicant shall, where possible, source their plastic from a supplier that is committed to a Responsible Plastic Program.

## Acknowledgements

The RPM Program would like to thank the persons and committees who helped draft and peer review this RPM Standard.

The RPM Program welcomes all comments on the RPM Standard and will feed these into working group committees.

The RPM Standard will be subject to regular review for relevance and practicality.

More information is available on the RPM Program Website: [www.rpmprogram.com](http://www.rpmprogram.com)

## Definitions

*Please refer to the RPM Program Website: [www.rpmprogram.com](http://www.rpmprogram.com)*

## Normative References

*Please refer to the RPM Program Website: [www.rpmprogram.com](http://www.rpmprogram.com)*



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