McDonald's to ditch plastic straws

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McDonald's will replace plastic straws with paper ones in all its UK and Ireland restaurants, starting from September.

It is the latest company to opt out of some single-use plastic products which can take hundreds of years to decompose if not recycled.

The restaurant chain uses 1.8 million straws a day in the UK.

"Reflecting the broader public debate, our customers told us they wanted to see a move on straws," the firm said.

This decision follows a successful trial in selected restaurants earlier this year. The move to paper straws will be completed next year.
Environment Secretary Michael Gove called it a "significant contribution" to helping the environment, adding that it was "a fine example to other large businesses".

The ban does not yet extend to the rest of the chain's global empire, but trials will begin in selected restaurants in the US, France and Norway.

In some other countries, straws are being offered on request only.

In April, the government proposed a ban on plastic straws and cotton buds in England. But many businesses, including Waitrose, Costa Coffee, and Wagamama, have already started to take action.

All JD Wetherspoon pubs stopped using plastic straws at the beginning of the year. Pizza Express said it would replace all plastic straws with biodegradable ones by summer 2018.

And more than 60 independent British festivals - including Boardmasters and Bestival - have banned plastic straws as part of a pledge to rid their sites of single-use plastic by 2021.

Most straws are made from plastics such as polypropylene and polystyrene, which unless recycled take hundreds of years to decompose.

Many end up in landfill and the oceans, and the BBC's Blue Planet II highlighted the damage plastic can cause to marine wildlife.

But not everyone thinks total bans are the answer.

Plastic straws enable many disabled people to drink independently, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson said. She said paper alternatives were not always suitable or safe.

And Tetra Pak - the food packaging company - has said plastic straws serve a "vital" function in cartons and should not be banned.

It argues that straws can be recycled together with cartons if they are pushed back into the box.
Transcend Packaging in Wales, and Huhtamaki in Belfast, will supply the straws for all 1,361 McDonald's restaurants.

The straws will use paper from certified sustainable sources, the company said.

"The government's ambitious plans, combined with strong customer opinion, has helped to accelerate the move away from plastic and I'm proud that we've been able to play our part," said Paul Pomroy, chief executive of McDonald's UK and Ireland.