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Londoners wake up to 'biggest ever' coffee cup recycling scheme across the Square Mile



Michael Holder

03 April 2017



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One of the coffee cup recycling bins being used for the initiative

Costa, Starbucks, Marks & Spencer and financial firms across City of London collaborate in bid to collect five million used coffee cups by end of 2017

recycling before the end of 2017.

Launched today, the 'Square Mile Challenge' aims to collect 500,000 cups by the end of April via specially-designed recycling bins in shops, train stations, businesses, and on the streets across the capital's financial district.

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The scheme, spearheaded by environmental charity Hubbub and backed by a host of companies from a range of sectors, is aimed at tackling the estimated seven million coffee cups thrown away by caffeine-fuelled Britons every day, of which less than one per cent are recycled.

If successful, the charity said it planned to create a guide for other cities, communities, and businesses to replicate the campaign elsewhere.

"We hope that other parts of the UK will follow suit and eventually reach a point where recycling levels for coffee cups are on a par with those for drinks cans and bottles," said Gavin Ellis, co-founder of Hubbub.

"It would be easy to suggest that everyone should use reusable cups for our hot drinks, but the reality is that disposable cups are being used in their millions and so we have to deliver a solution to this issue."

Used coffee cups are difficult to recycle to due to their mix of paper and plastic materials alongside coffee remnants, an issue brought to public attention by TV chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall [last year](#).

But Hubbub said it was essential not to create a "greenwash campaign" for companies involved and has appointed an independent evaluation agency to track the journey of the cups collected during the new campaign.

Some of the cups will be transformed into new recycled plastic products "that will be returned to the City of London for wider community benefit" while other cups will be turned into cardboard packaging products, the charity said.

As part of the campaign, more than 100 high street coffee outlets, including Costa, Starbucks, McDonald's, Caffè Nero, Pret a Manger and Marks & Spencer, are offering recycling facilities and accepting coffee cups in their stores for collection, regardless of where the cups are purchased.

Bright yellow coffee cup collection bins have also been rolled out on a number of streets across the Square Mile, as well as inside Liverpool Street and Cannon Street train stations.

Meanwhile, employees at more than 30 organisations based in the City of London, such as the Barbican Centre, London Metropolitan University and businesses inside the Leadenhall building are also collecting coffee cups in their offices.

Hubbub has [produced a map](#) of the 150 places in London's Square Mile at which used coffee cups are being collected. Meanwhile, street cleaners in the area will also have special tubes on their carts to enable them to collect the cups.

London's Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy, Shirley Rodrigues, welcomed the initiative. "Until now there has been no consistent, reliable way to recycle coffee cups in the heart of London and so the Square Mile Challenge is a big step forward," she said. "I hope this scheme is a success and will encourage local authorities and businesses to start recycling coffee cups across the capital."

Research [last week](#) by Cardiff University found that a combination of financial incentives, re-usable alternatives and clear public messaging of the environmental impacts of waste could help to prevent between 50 and 300 million coffee cups being thrown away every year.

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