

## HOLLAND & BARRETT BECOMES FIRST HIGH-STREET RETAILER TO BAN WET-WIPES

*The high-street chain, which was the first retailer to ban both plastic bags and microplastics, will no longer buy, sell or produce wet-wipes as part of its 'Clean and Conscious' pledge, as it calls for other major retailers to do the same.*

Holland & Barrett has today announced a complete ban on the sale of all wet wipe products from its 800 UK and Ireland stores, with all wet wipe products and variants replaced by environmentally friendly and sustainable alternatives by end of September 2019.

Millions of wet-wipes are sold in the UK every year, with uses spanning make-up removal and hand sanitisers to surface cleaners.

But according to the EarthWatch Institute and Plastic Oceans UK<sup>i</sup>, 9.3million wipes are still flushed down toilets in the UK every single day, making their way to the world's oceans, rivers and sewage systems, damaging marine life and creating huge costs for consumers from sewer blockages.

This is why the UK's leading ethical health and wellness retailer has announced that all 34 products in its wet wipe range are being delisted and will be gone from all 800 UK and Ireland stores and all participating international stores by end of September 2019.

It is the first high street retailer to implement such a ban and it is calling on other retailers to follow suit and make a major difference to the volume of wet wipes polluting the world's oceans and rivers and clogging up sewage systems across the country.

In the UK, the popular products are blamed for 80% of blockages in our sewers, costing an estimated £100 million a year to clear. Internationally, the problem is much bigger with wet wipe demand growing to \$13.5 billion in 2018<sup>ii</sup>.

While there are some new types of biodegradable wipes that are described as flushable and compostable, both Friends of the Earth and Water UK, the industry body, warn that these won't degrade quickly enough to avoid being a menace down drains or in our rivers.

The vast majority of wet-wipes are not biodegradable, so those that do escape sewage filters have an even greater environmental impact, finishing their journey in oceans or washing up on beaches. Traditional wet-wipes are made of polyester and contain millions of chemical microfibres. Once in water, these fibres are released and cause death and destruction to a host of marine species.

Jo Ruxton, founder of Plastic Oceans Foundation, the first plastic pollution NGO in the UK that addresses the impact plastic pollution has on our oceans, strongly supports Holland and Barrett's decision and said:

*"From our campaigning work since 2009 and film A Plastic Ocean, we have shown the damage that plastic pollution is doing to our oceans. Single use plastic items represent a major part of this problem and this destruction will soon be irreversible if the world doesn't make a change. We are delighted that Holland and Barrett are taking a clear lead on sustainability by banning one of the problem products we see in our rivers and oceans - single use, disposable wet wipes - which use the world's precious resources to manufacture, still come in plastic packaging, and still get flushed down the loo or thrown in the bin. We hope that other large retailers will join Holland & Barrett on their mission to make the high-street a more environmentally-conscious place."*

Holland & Barrett will remove its entire range and replace them with sustainable, waste-free and re-usable alternatives such as double-sided cotton cloths, unbleached cotton muslin cloths, cotton pads and an exfoliating mitt.

In May 2018, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced its plan to eliminate plastic waste by 2042, to include wet-wipes. However, they are now considering improved labelling on wet wipe disposal instead, a move which the brand feels doesn't go far enough.

Holland & Barrett believes that as there are effective and sustainable alternatives to non-biodegradable wet-wipes, it would help safeguard marine life and put an end to costly sewer blockages if the Government reverted to its original decision to review and include wet wipes in its 2042 plastic elimination programme.

Joanne Cooke, Head of Beauty at Holland & Barrett, explained:

*“There is a growing awareness of how much our current throwaway culture is damaging our oceans, beaches and rivers. We want to encourage our customers to think about what they currently throw away and encourage them to swap to more sustainable alternatives. The quickest way for us all to make a positive impact on the world we live in is to choose to spend our money on more sustainable products.”*

In recent months, the true extent of wet-wipes' impact on water systems has only been further highlighted in the discovery of multiple 'Fatbergs'; congealed masses, made up of predominantly (93%) wet-wipes<sup>iii</sup>, were found in sewage systems across the nation, with one in Devon<sup>iv</sup> taking more than eight weeks to remove.

Joanne Cooke added: *“The impact of single-use plastic on the earth is very evident, and so moving forward we will look to make our beauty offering as clean and conscious as possible.*

*“Clean when it comes to ingredients. You won't find parabens, SLS or micro plastics in any of the products that we sell, because there should be no compromise on the products you put on your skin, hair, face or body.*

*“And conscious, because we care about the world we live in. We are in the process of developing our beauty range to focus on recyclable & refillable and waterless products – we are making a commitment to buy into beauty that doesn't cost the earth. We also make sure all of our palm oil is from sustainable, RSPO certified, sources.”*

The problem of the nation's wet-wipe consumption is so vast that in 2018 it featured as the topic of a BBC Radio 4 investigation; 'Costing the Earth', which concluded that despite some wet-wipe brands claiming to be safe to flush, all 'flushable' or 'compostable' varieties have in-fact failed the water industry's disintegration tests<sup>v</sup>.

Joanne Cooke added: *“These wipes still use the world's precious resources to manufacture, still come in plastic packaging, and still get flushed down the loo or thrown in the bin, eventually ending in landfill.”*

*“There are a variety of eco-friendly alternatives to wet-wipes that are just as easy, efficient, and safe-to-skin and we're excited to be leading the way on these, alongside our exciting suppliers, who are already making huge strides in moving towards a more sustainable future.*

*“We hope other large retailers will join us on our mission to make the high-street a more environmentally conscious place.”*

Holland & Barrett's beauty range is available in 800 UK and Ireland stores nationwide and online at [www.hollandandbarrett.co.uk](http://www.hollandandbarrett.co.uk)

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### Notes to Editors

**FOR MEDIA INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS OR IMAGES PLEASE CONTACT:**

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### About L1 Retail

L1 Retail is the retail investment arm of LetterOne. LetterOne was founded in 2013 and is an international investment business headquartered in Luxembourg. LetterOne's strategy is to build a new portfolio of successful companies that are leaders in their fields and sectors. It makes long-term investments of its own capital in companies in which its sectoral experience and strategic and geographic expertise will improve performance and help companies grow. It has recruited world-class CEOs, sector investment teams and Advisory Boards to invest at scale. It buys and build assets, which it can develop over time as platforms of long-term sustainable growth.

### About Holland & Barrett

Holland & Barrett International is one of the world's leading health and wellness retailers and the largest in Europe, supplying its customers with a wide range of vitamins, minerals, health supplements, specialist foods and natural beauty products. With over 145 years of experience in the industry, the Holland & Barrett name is a familiar sight in almost every major city and town across the UK and is becoming increasingly more visible further afield, in markets as diverse as the Netherlands and Malta to the UAE, China and India. For more information, please visit [www.hollandandbarrett.com](http://www.hollandandbarrett.com).

### About Plastic Oceans UK

Plastic Oceans UK was the first UK NGO to focus on plastic pollution. Formed in 2009, the Foundation set out to raise awareness of the growing problem, through education, campaigning and engagement of the widest audiences through its multi-award winning feature-length film A Plastic Ocean. Following the film's release, the Foundation is focused on behaviour change through education, film, and innovating sustainability responses in business. For more information, please visit [www.plasticoceans.uk](http://www.plasticoceans.uk), Twitter: @plasticoceans, Instagram: @plasticoceansuk

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.earthwatch.org.uk/images/downloads/plastic/Top10-Plastics-Action-Map-web.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.freedoniagroup.com/industry-study/world-wipes-3251.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.mcsuk.org/news/wet-wipes>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-47724968>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46188354>