# UK's disposable vape ban exposes challenges in defining and enforcing reusable standards



With a staggering 13.5 million disposable vapes sold weekly in the UK, the impending ban on single-use devices—effective June 2025—addresses a crisis of waste that has seen millions of these products improperly discarded or recycled. Research from Material Focus, an independent organisation dedicated to recycling electrical waste, reveals that approximately 60% of these vapes, equating to around 8.2 million devices, end up in landfills each week. This environmental burden is exacerbated by the fact that over 90% of vape producers and retailers are reportedly failing to comply with necessary legal obligations to manage the recycling of used products.

As the initiative to phase out disposable vapes approaches, there is a promising trend emerging: a notable decline in disposable vape usage, particularly among young adults. A study from University College London indicates that one in seven people aged 18 to 24 uses disposable vapes, reflecting an urgent need for change. Thankfully, some leading brands are responding by developing reusable products, such as prefilled pod kits, which aim to align better with environmental goals.

However, despite these positive developments, concerns linger amongst environmental campaigners regarding the authenticity of some so-called reusable vapes. Reports have surfaced of brands employing deceptive practices; for instance, certain devices are equipped with non-functional charging ports, effectively misrepresenting their usability and environmental benefit. The design choices made by companies like SKE further illustrate this problem. While they have introduced a genuinely refillable device alongside another that, despite being labeled as reusable, possesses excessive and unwieldy fittings, thus adding to plastic waste rather than mitigating it.

According to the UK's Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, products must allow for easy access and replacement of refills to meet the criteria for being classified as reusable. This regulatory standard emphasises the need for practicality in design; anything less could undermine genuine attempts to promote sustainability. The oversized design of certain refillable devices raises questions about their actual contribution to reducing waste and whether they merely comply with regulations without fulfilling their ecological promise.

The UK's Green Claims Code stipulates that marketing claims featuring terms like "eco-friendly" must be substantiated with evidence; otherwise, they risk misleading consumers. Given the existing challenges with significant waste generation, labelling low-quality reusable products as environmentally sound may lead to not only consumer distrust but also breaches of advertising standards.

The imminent ban on disposable vapes is poised to be a landmark move towards enhanced environmental responsibility. Nevertheless, the enforcement of this legislation must scrutinise both the claims made by companies and the practical realities of product usage. To achieve meaningful outcomes, brands must ensure that their offerings genuinely honour the spirit of reuse, not simply the letter of the law.

As society anticipates this transition, it is clear that a stringent definition of what constitutes a reusable product is paramount. Upholding this standard could herald a significant reduction in vape waste, potentially transforming the landscape of sustainable product regulations in the UK. Effective implementation, combined with genuine commitment from both industry and consumers, offers a hopeful path forward in the effort to protect our environment from mounting plastic and electronic waste.

### Reference Map

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.londondaily.news/the-disposable-vape-ban-and-why-reusable-must-mean-reusable/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.materialfocus.org.uk/press-releases/over-90-of-vape-producers-and-retailers-in-the-uk-are-still-failing-to-meet-environmental-regulations/> - A 2024 study by Material Focus revealed that over 90% of vape producers and retailers in the UK are not complying with environmental regulations. This non-compliance means they are failing to cover the costs of collecting and recycling vapes, leading to significant environmental waste. The research also highlighted that 5 million single-use vapes are discarded or improperly recycled every week, equating to 8 per second. The study emphasizes the need for immediate action to address this growing environmental issue.
3. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/jan/ban-disposable-vapes-would-affect-one-seven-young-adults> - A University College London study published in January 2024 found that a proposed ban on disposable vapes would impact approximately one in seven young adults (aged 18-24) in Great Britain. The research, based on survey responses from 69,973 adults between January 2021 and August 2023, indicated a significant rise in disposable e-cigarette use among young adults, with 14.4% using them in 2023. The study suggests that such a ban would affect an estimated 2.6 million people in England, Wales, and Scotland.
4. <https://www.materialfocus.org.uk/press-releases/whilst-a-vape-ban-sends-a-strong-signal-millions-of-vapes-will-continue-to-be-sold-and-will-need-to-be-recycled/> - Material Focus, a not-for-profit organization, highlighted in October 2024 that despite the forthcoming ban on single-use vapes, millions of these products will continue to be sold and will require recycling. The study noted that 90% of retailers and producers are still not meeting their legal obligations to collect and recycle vapes. The research also pointed out the emergence of new products like 'rechargeable disposables' and 'big puff' models, which may circumvent potential regulations, adding to the environmental challenge.
5. <https://www.materialfocus.org.uk/press-releases/disposable-single-use-vapes-thrown-away-have-quadrupled-to-5-million-per-week/> - Research by Material Focus, published in September 2023, revealed that the number of disposable single-use vapes thrown away has increased fourfold, reaching 5 million per week. This surge equates to 8 vapes discarded every second. The study also highlighted that the potential annual cost of collecting and recycling these vapes stands at £200 million, a responsibility that is currently not being met by vape producers, importers, and retailers. The research underscores the urgent need for effective recycling solutions and industry compliance.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/16/more-than-a-million-vapes-a-day-in-uk-thrown-away-says-research> - An article from The Guardian, dated December 16, 2024, reported that over a million vapes are discarded daily in the UK, according to research commissioned by Material Focus. The study found that 8.2 million vapes are either binned or recycled incorrectly every week. The article also highlighted the environmental risks associated with improper disposal, noting that these devices contain lithium-ion batteries, which can cause fires if mishandled. The forthcoming ban on single-use vapes aims to address these environmental concerns.
7. <https://www.materialfocus.org.uk/press-releases/big-puff-vapes-are-surging-onto-the-market-adding-to-the-vape-environmental-crisis/> - Material Focus, in a December 2024 press release, highlighted the surge of 'big puff' vapes entering the UK market, exacerbating the environmental crisis. These new products are designed to circumvent the forthcoming ban on single-use vapes. The study noted that 8.2 million vapes are discarded or recycled incorrectly every week, with 3 million of these being 'big puff' vapes. The research emphasizes the need for accessible recycling options and industry compliance to mitigate environmental damage.