

# Shelter Sector Guidance

## **Guidance on minimising solid waste production**

Poorly managed solid waste is one of the most visible negative impacts of humanitarian responses. When response activities are planned without considering waste reduction, relief items and their packaging can generate large quantities of waste. Small disposable items or packaging can produce a vast amount of waste at scale.



**One 20-gram piece of plastic for one person** seems insignificant, especially if solid waste management systems exist



But if **500,000 people** use one 20-gram single-use plastic item every day, it **creates 10 tonnes of plastic waste per day**.

Local waste management systems quickly become overwhelmed when large amounts of solid waste material are generated by a humanitarian response. This can lead to poor management of solid waste which can **negatively impact the health and wellbeing of communities** by increasing disease vectors, releasing toxic chemicals, and increasing disaster risks.

### **Design your SOPs to avoid single-use items.**

1. **Strongly avoid single-use items and packaging.** Single-use items, for example plastic bottles or polystyrene (Styrofoam) food containers, should always be strongly avoided. They generate large quantities of often unrecyclable waste and can contain dangerous chemicals. Such materials should always be seen as an absolute last resort.
2. **Never burn plastics or polystyrene** as a disposal method. Burning these materials releases dangerous toxic chemicals into the air and soil. These chemicals can last a long time and have long-term impacts on human health.
3. **Preference is always given to reusable items.** Whenever possible reusable items like bottles and food containers should be **introduced as early as possible in a response**. **Cross-sector collaboration, for example with the WASH sector, is vital** to ensure that such items can be adequately cleaned for safe reuse. If this is done from the very beginning it can achieve a large savings in the cost of distribution and waste management. Reusable items are also of more long-term value to the target community.
4. When planning an activity or project, **take the time to calculate the waste that would be produced by the activity during implementation**. Understanding the impact of scale and duration on how much waste an activity produces often quickly makes the case for reducing the use of single-use items.
5. When planning an activity or project, **take the time to map the kinds of waste that will be produced and make a plan for how it will be managed**.