Amazon eliminated plastic packaging at one of its warehouses

Amazon is fulfilling a small part of its promise to switch from using plastic bubble mailers and air pillows to all recyclable paper packaging for its shipments. The company announced that it has outfitted one facility in Euclid, Ohio, with an upgraded packaging machine that can automatically fold custom-fit boxes to wrap some products, use paper mailers for small items, and slide in paper fillers instead of plastic ones in standard boxes.

Amazon's efforts to switch to nonplastic materials come after the company's promise in July to cut out plastic mailers in favor of recyclable alternatives. Non-padded paper mailers are largely not as durable as plastic ones, but Amazon says it developed paper rolls that can stretch, seal with heat, have some weather resistance, and are curbside recyclable.

As Amazon transitions over to curbside recyclable packaging, it will "reduce the company's plastic waste and the amount of plastic pollution that can reach the seas," says Matt Littlejohn, senior vice president of Oceana, a conservation organization. However, Littlejohn questions Amazon's commitment to end plastic use in the US, its largest market, compared to the commitments it made for the UK, Germany, and other markets. Amazon says it'll be a "multiyear effort" to move US warehouses to recyclable paper.

"Unfortunately, Amazon, in this announcement, did not make a clear, quantifiable, and time-bound commitment, so it is unclear when, where, and how much real plastic reduction there

will be,” Littlejohn says.

Nonetheless, Amazon’s decision to convert at least one facility to plastic-free packaging demonstrates that it’s possible for fulfillment centers of any kind to curb plastic use. The company also avoided packing 11 percent of shipped products altogether in 2022, opting to slap a label directly on manufacturer boxes if they’re deemed sturdy enough.

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