

Denmark's Top 10 corporate plastic polluters have been found

Denmark's top corporate plastic polluters 2021 have been identified in this year's Brand Audit*. The audit reveals what specific plastic products that pollute the Danish environment, as well as the producers that are behind the plastic products. The audits in Denmark were conducted by the environmental NGO Plastic Change in collaboration with volunteers around the country. The collected and analyzed data are furthermore part of the global Brand Audit from Break Free From Plastic, which reveals the top corporate plastic polluters in the world.

British American Tobacco, Royal Unibrew and Carlsberg Group tops the list in Denmark

They hide between cobblestones and street tiles, among blades of grass, and in the sand on Danish beaches. This year's Danish Brand Audit, however, shows that it is found everywhere. The cigarette filter. Among other things, it is also the cigarette filter that brings British American Tobacco to the top of the list of plastic polluters in this year's Danish Brand Audit. However, the cigarette filter is accompanied by cigarette packaging and packaging for nicotine pouches, which also pollute the Danish landscape. British American Tobacco is behind brands such as Prince, Kings and Lyft, which are among the Danes' favorite brands when it comes to tobacco and nicotine products. However, a lot of plastic waste was also found from the brand Marlboro, which brought the producer behind Marlboro: Philip Morris International up to a 5th place on the list of the ten largest plastic polluters of plastic waste in the Danish environment.

On the second and third place among the most plastic-polluting producers, we find Royal Unibrew and Carlsberg Group with single-use plastic packaging for various foods and beverages often consumed on-the-go in nature and the open urban space or at outdoor events.

The companies' CSR initiatives and green strategies are inadequate

All producers on the Danish top 10 list have for a number of years worked with sustainability and reduction of their climate footprint and environmental impact. However, the position in the top 10 list shows that the efforts have been inadequate when it comes to plastic pollution from products and packaging after the consumer has bought and consumed the product. So far, the attitude has often been that it is a consumer behavioral problem when waste ends up in nature. The companies' green strategies and CSR initiatives are therefore rarely targeting the design and innovation of products and systems with the aim of preventing their products and packaging from ending up in nature. With the forthcoming extended producer responsibility, however, companies will be held responsible for their products and packaging throughout their life cycle - even after the products have reached the consumer and possibly end up in nature.

Companies must be held responsible for pollution

The EU has required all EU countries to introduce the extended producer responsibility, which means that companies are financially responsible for the negative consequences of their products for nature and climate. In other words, companies have to pay for the handling of their products and packaging, even after it has become waste. There is therefore good reason to be interested in what ends up in Danish nature to ensure that companies are also given financial responsibility for the part of their products and packaging that does not end up in the bin. In this way, the extended producer responsibility may help to push for the development of smarter packaging and better products that do not end up in nature.

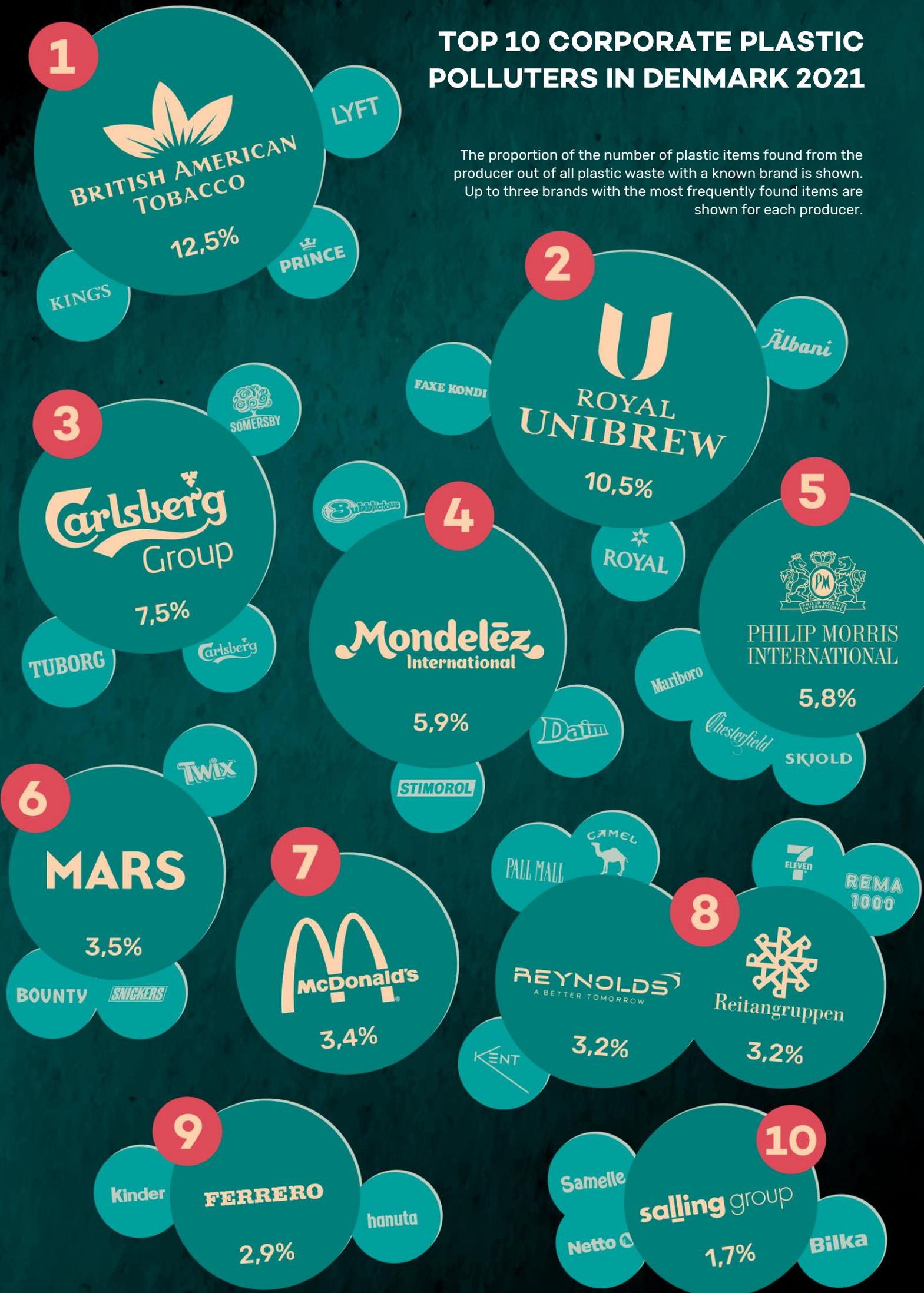
"It is our ambition that we implement a producer responsibility that motivates rethinking for both products and systems. For example, we have had a deposit return system on our bottles and cans, which means that we see very few of these products in Danish nature. Maybe we can be inspired by what we already know."

Anne Aittomaki, strategic director in Plastic Change

*Producer is defined as the legal owner of the brand. In the case of affiliated companies, the parent company being the ultimate owner of the brand is considered as the producer.

TOP 10 CORPORATE PLASTIC POLLUTERS IN DENMARK 2021

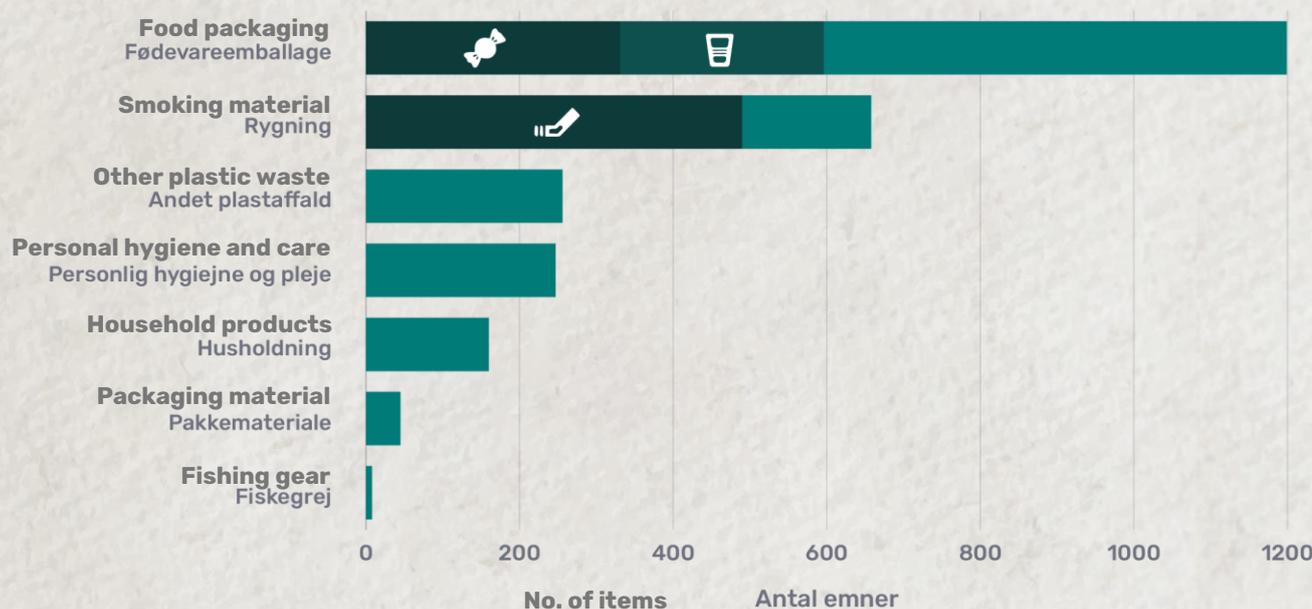
The proportion of the number of plastic items found from the producer out of all plastic waste with a known brand is shown. Up to three brands with the most frequently found items are shown for each producer.



Denmark is drowning in cigarette butts, candy wrappers and single-use plastic cups

The analysis of all the collected plastic waste, i.e. both the plastic waste with identifiable brands and the plastic waste where the brand and the producer could not be identified, shows the same trend as the Brand Audit. The plastic waste in Danish nature is first and foremost smoking material and food packaging.

In the category Food Packaging, packaging for candy and ice cream as well as single-use plastic cups constitute the largest plastic waste products with 331 and 265 items, respectively. Within Smoking Material, cigarette butts and filters are the most important part with 490 items. Together, these three product types account for 42% of all plastic waste collected.



The results from Denmark differ in particular in one area from the global results

Simultaneously with the Danish Brand Audit, a similar global Brand Audit was carried out by Break Free From Plastic, to whom a large number of countries, including Denmark, have reported data from the national Brand Audits. In this year's international Brand Audit, Coca-Cola once again tops the list of the world's biggest corporate plastic polluters. The list also includes PepsiCo, Unilever, Mondelez International, Nestlé and other multinational corporations. In one area in particular, the Danish results differ from the international results, and that is in the absence of plastic bottles. In the international Brand Audit, the plastic bottle is the third largest fraction of plastic waste, next to sachets (small plastic bags for everything from ketchup to shampoo) and cigarette butts.

"The absence of plastic bottles in Danish nature is of course due to our well-functioning deposit return system. This is exactly why it is worth considering what we can learn from the deposit return system in relation to the products that end up in nature. For example, how systems, legislation and standardization can remove waste from nature."

Anne Aittomaki, strategic director in Plastic Change

Brand Audit is a new global conversation about responsibility

The objective of the Brand Audit in Denmark and globally is to start a conversation about responsibility for plastic pollution. A conversation that focuses much more on the products and packaging that companies put on the market, rather than focusing solely on consumer behavior. The responsibility cannot simply be placed on the individual or community – especially not when these products and packaging have not been properly thought through to begin with. In the circular economy that we are in the process of transitioning to, responsibility follows all the way around the circular system. This means that the producers and companies are responsible for both packaging and products throughout its life cycle.

The method behind Brand Audit

Data for this year's Brand Audit was collected as part of the global event World Cleanup Day in September, where volunteers all over the world, also across Denmark, did waste clean-ups in nature. For the waste that is included in the Danish Brand Audit itself, 58 volunteers in 9 locations in Denmark have collected waste and registered data based on a protocol developed by Break Free From Plastic and (translated and adjusted by) Plastic Change. The nine locations for the data collections took place in the urban environment, parks, at the coast, at a lake, and in a river in the Capital Area, North and Central Zealand, Funen and Jutland. In total, there were approx. 85 man-hours spent in collecting at least 90 kg of waste, which was registered in the Brand Audit events, where each found item was examined and registered for type of product and brand. Also items without visible and identifiable brand names were registered. A total of 3165 waste items were found and registered, of which 2573 items (81%) were made of plastic (wholly or partly). Of the plastic items, a brand could be identified on 1055 items (41%), and furthermore a producer/parent company could be found on 917 items (36%). That is, for 138 plastic items with an identified brand, a producer could not be identified with certainty.



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