

Similarities and Differences: Plastic-Containing Wet Wipes – Welsh vs. Draft English Regulations.

David E James Consultancy Ltd has had a look at the draft English regulation “The Environmental Protection (Wet Wipes Containing Plastic) (England) Regulations 2025 draft SI “and has done a quick compare and contrast against “The Environmental protection(Single use plastic products) (Wet wipes)(Wales) Regulations 2025” and also against elements of the EU Single use plastics Directive 2019/904 and its associated guidelines document.

The Welsh and English governments are both progressing legislation to restrict the supply of wet wipes containing plastic. While their aims are broadly aligned, key differences exist in definitions, exemptions, and implementation details.

Similarities

- **Ban on supply to consumers:**
Both regulations prohibit the supply (including free of charge) of wet wipes containing plastic to consumers, subject to certain exemptions.
- **Definition of “wet wipe”:**
Both define a wet wipe as “*a non-woven piece of fabric which has been pre-wetted*”.
- **Definition of “plastic”:**
Each regulation excludes unmodified natural polymers and aligns with the general principle that plastic is a polymer-based material capable of forming a structural component.
 - The **Welsh** definition is based on the *Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Act 2023*.
 - The **English** draft references Article 3(5) of *REACH Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006*.
- **Exemptions for medical use:**
Both provide exemptions for wet wipes used in a **medical context**, although the scope and mechanism differ (see below).

Additional Observations

- The **Welsh regulation’s simplicity** contrasts with the **greater specificity and layering of exemptions in the English draft**, especially around retail pharmacy controls and supply chains.
- The **Welsh approach** relies on a clear, focused exemption for medical use, whereas the **English draft** integrates more structured operational provisions (e.g. conditions for pharmacies and businesses).

Comparison: Welsh vs. Draft English Regulations on Plastic-containing Wet Wipes

Aspect	Wales (<i>SI 2025 No. 716 (W. 124)</i>)	England (<i>Draft SI 2025</i>)
Title	The Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wet Wipes) (Wales) Regulations 2025	The Environmental Protection (Wet Wipes Containing Plastic) (England) Regulations 2025
Implementation date	Comes into force on 18 December 2026 (Reg 1(2))	Not explicitly stated in the draft Will come into force 18 months after regulation is publicised.
Ban scope	Offence to supply or offer to supply (including free of charge) wet wipes containing plastic to consumers (Regulation 2 and Explanatory Note)	Same scope under Regulation 3(1) – ban on supply to end users.
Definition – Wet wipe	“A non-woven piece of fabric which has been pre-wetted” (Regulation 3)	Same: “A non-woven piece of fabric which has been pre-wetted and which is not designed or intended to be re-used”
Definition – Plastic	Defined in the 2023 Act : material made of polymer (excluding unmodified natural polymers, adhesives, paints, inks) – Reg 1(4) and (5) of 2023 Act	Defined by reference to REACH Regulation (EC) No. 1907/2006 ; excludes unmodified natural polymers, but no explicit mention of adhesives, paints, or inks
Medical exemption	Exemption for supply of wipes “designed or manufactured for use in connection with medical care or treatment”	Exemption for supply for medical purposes by/under direction of

Aspect	Wales (<i>SI 2025 No. 716 (W. 124)</i>)	England (<i>Draft SI 2025</i>)
Pharmacy exemption	<p>(Regulation 2; Schedule para 1, col. 2) “Medical” includes surgical; “Treatment” includes diagnosis (Regulation 3)</p> <p>Not included in Welsh regulation- the exemption to allow pharmacies to continue supplying wet wipes with plastic content has been simplified to allow the continued supply of plastic containing wet wipes in any setting if they are “designed or manufactured for use in medical care or treatment”(Welsh Government (2025))</p>	<p>healthcare professionals or by NHS contractors (Reg 6) “Medical purposes” include diagnosis, treatment, preventive medicine, research</p> <p>Permits supply by registered pharmacies under strict conditions: not displayed, only provided upon request, no advertisement (Reg 5)</p>
Business/local authority exemption	<p>Not explicitly included in Welsh regulation. It is an offense to supply or offer to supply (including for free) wet wipes to CONSUMERS in Wales.- A specific exemption for industrial use is not required in Wales, as the offences of “supply” or offer to supply “ only apply to “Consumers” who are defined as “Individual(s) acting for purposes that are wholly or mainly outside that individual’s trade, business or profession”(Welsh Government,(2025).</p>	<p>Permits supply to businesses and local authorities (Reg 7)</p>
Reference to reuse	<p>Single-use defined in 2023 Act as “not designed or manufactured to be used more than once” (Section 1(3))</p>	<p>Draft explicitly includes "not designed or intended to be re-used" in definition of wet wipe</p>
Review clause	<p>No specific review provision in this SI</p>	<p>Includes a review clause (Regulation 14)</p>
EU alignment	<p>Definition aligns with Directive (EU) 2019/904, specifically excludes adhesives etc. per Recital 11</p>	<p>Alignment unclear; lacks explicit exclusion of adhesives, raising potential divergence</p>

Aspect **Wales (SI 2025 No. 716 (W. 124))** **England (Draft SI 2025)**
from EU guidance

Questions should be raised as to whether England will issue supporting **guidelines** akin to the **EU's 2021 Guidance Document (2021/C 216/01)**, which helps clarify terms such as "plastic", and how to treat materials like viscose , lyocell and adhesives.

The David E James Consultancy Ltd urges readers to review and comment on the draft English regulation. DEFRA have requested comments or views on the draft regulations, by 31 July,2025 to be sent to WetWipes@defra.gov.uk

Readers should always consult the most up to date / issued regulation. The above is my interpretation of reading a draft regulation.

References:

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Welsh Government (2025). Written statement ,Update on the timetable and proposals to introduce legislation to ban the supply of wet wipes containing plastic. Available from: <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-update-timetable-and-proposals-introduce-legislation-ban-supply-wet-wipes> (Accessed: July,2025)

