



Position Paper Packaging – An Important Tool for A Sustainable Society



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“Better Quality Of Life Through Better Packaging For More People” is the primary goal of the World Packaging Organisation. WPO believes that Society must learn to value the importance of packaging. By educating people, industry, and government in a constructive, productive way, packaging will become respected as the vital tool that it undeniably is.

Packaging is used everywhere, by highly industrialized countries and developing nations alike. Good packaging is a most-important tool for the well-being and safety of people, and for successful commerce. Packaging contains, preserves, protects, transports, and communicates. Modern Society cannot survive without packaging.

The dilemma is that as world population increases and world-wide distribution chains become more sophisticated, the corresponding increase in the use of packaging has the potential of becoming as much a problem as a solution. In some parts of the world, some poorly informed people would prefer a significant reduction, and in some cases, elimination of packaging. This regression is based on a lack of understanding of the overall impact that packaging has upon Society.

Actually, packaging has tremendous resource-saving potential. Clearly, over-packaging consumes too many resources. Under-packaging allows for damage and spoilage of contents, also wasting resources. The goal is “right size” and “right strength” packaging. It is the result of a holistic view that balances the proper use of resources against the environmental, social, and financial needs of packaging users and Society.

The facts are clear. The production of packaging materials consumes both natural and human resources. The application of those materials further uses more valuable resources. Finally, the disposal of packaging materials into landfills, incinerators, and, inappropriately, on the sides of countless highways and roads, waterways, seas and forests as litter, also requires the utilization of more valuable resources, most of which could have been used again, or differently.

Clearly, the Sustainability movement is transforming the traditional principles by which the Packaging Community conducts business. This change in philosophy will bind together WPO with its goals in a new, more dynamic way. Ultimately, the whole of Society will benefit.

WPO is bringing this initiative forward for all members of the Packaging Community including, non-profit educational groups, standards organizations, for-profit commercial ventures, and trade organisations. All will benefit from the efforts of WPO, its members and partners, to educate others. Through these efforts, the Packaging Community will better understand the importance of global collaboration and teamwork in packaging development, application, reuse, recycling and recovery.

Many packaging materials have not been thought of as renewable through recycling, at least until recently. With the introduction of the hypothesis of Sustainable Development, that pattern continues to

change dramatically. As defined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Clearly, “reduce, reuse, recycle, recover” are not just idealistic words any longer. They are a call to action. They are the basis for an operative, powerful model that will grow significantly over time. But, identifying the most sustainable path for packaging can be very complicated. And the fact is, there is typically more than one acceptable solution. What is important for us, as packaging professionals, is that it is essential that we include all the factors when writing the equation and assessing options. This means we must consider the complete lifecycle of the product system. ISO 14040 gives us the following definition for ‘life cycle’: *“consecutive and interlinked stages of a product system, from raw material acquisition or generation from natural resources to final disposal.”*... in other words, cradle-to-grave.

Incorporating all the factors in a life cycle analysis is impossible, but the key factors must be included for an analysis to be meaningful. Quoting from the EUROPE/ECR Europe Guide: “Conventional approaches tend to regard packaging sustainability issues in isolation from the packaged product system. This approach is likely to lead to sub-optimal results if improvements in packaging are obtained at the expense of decreased performance of the packaged product.”

So it is the responsibility of the Packaging Community to address these issues in practical ways that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The stakeholders, People, Business, and Government, all have roles to play. To be successful, the people’s case and the business case must both be addressed effectively, and in harmony. The government’s role is to give the other two stakeholders the ability to sort out the compromises and to harmonize the regulations nationally, or internationally.

Now, consider the Principles for how Packaging can support a Sustainable Society, and how they can be applied in practice.

- The package should be designed in a holistic way. This means that design of the package should begin at the same time as the product in order to maximize compatibility with the external and internal environments that the package will come in contact with.
- Use materials that are sourced in a responsible way.
- Product and package must meet the needs of the marketplace at a competitive cost.
- Manufacturing processes should incorporate environmentally clean methods and safe machinery.
- Package material should be easily recoverable once its primary purpose is satisfied.
- Energy and other resources for manufacturing and distribution should be renewable if feasible.

The last piece of the puzzle, and perhaps the greatest challenge, is education of the Public. In most cultures, the general public doesn’t know what to do with used packaging materials, or doesn’t care. Many don’t even think about packaging, in a positive or negative sense. WPO and all members of the Packaging Community must motivate and educate the Public to:

1. Understand their role in making their society more Sustainable and how packaging plays a role;
2. Develop ways to execute an organized recycling program;
3. Send messages back to manufacturers that they demand products produced and packaged to support a sustainable society.

WPO, as an important member of the Packaging Community, is taking an active, leadership role in addressing this issue where total cost and total value intersect. The World cannot do without packaging, but the World can also use packaging more effectively and efficiently, meeting the needs of people while being conscious about sustaining the environment and all its resources, natural and otherwise. “Better quality of life,” as stated in WPO’s purpose, isn’t just about this generation. “Better quality of life” is evident in Brundtland’s Sustainability requirement “to meet the needs of future generations” as well.

In the effort to support a sustainable society, WPO aims to globally promote:

- The positive economic, social and environmental impact of packaging on society;
- A reduction of the negative environmental impact of packaging on society and the environment;
- Development of packaging technology, sciences, and engineering;
- Communication concerning packaging technology and applications;
- Advancement of packaging skills and expertise through education;
- A forum for national and international organisations to further the state of the art of packaging;
- Expansion of international trade, not the least to support developing countries and economies.

The new model for packaging requires that sustainable methods and materials be employed whenever possible, and even where it may seem to be impossible.

This new way of thinking plays well to WPO’s unique position in the Packaging Community. Dr. Carl Olsmats, General Secretary of WPO states that Sustainability “in principle means that continuous improvement has to be applied to all packaging. There will always be a demand for training and education in order to accomplish [this] task.”

Society demands, without really knowing it, that Packaging Professionals ‘get it right.’ Efficient and effective use of resources in packaging is essential to Society’s aim to become more Sustainable. The World Packaging Organization is committed to continuing to bring together many of the great minds within the Packaging Community as we work toward our goal of *“Better Quality Of Life Through Better Packaging For More People”*.