

Packaging in Context

Packaging is an essential part of our daily lives. Packaging is required to contain, protect and preserve products, make them easier to transport and carry, provide the customer with information on a product and enhance the sales appeal of that product.

The challenge for a business is to use the correct packaging relevant to the product which it surrounds. This means that an understanding is required of the packaging process, the functions packaging fulfils, and what happens to packaging once it has been removed from a product.

Current legislation requires that packaging should be designed to use the minimum amount of material consistent with fulfilling the functions of packaging, and in such a manner as to facilitate reuse, recycling, recovery or disposal of packaging. Therefore, the minimum amount of packaging used in the first place will lead to the minimum amount that will eventually have to be managed as waste.

Packaging is not only the material surrounding a product sold to the consumer, it may be:

Primary - surrounds the product sold to the consumer.

Secondary - collates the sales units for ease of handling.

Tertiary - facilitates handling and transport of a number of sales units or collated sales units.

Section 2 will discuss these terms in greater depth.





The Packaging Waste Prevention Programme

Though Ireland's performance in increasing packaging recycling rates in the twelve years since Repak was established has been outstanding, there is now an increasing emphasis, both within Ireland and across Europe, to allocate resources to the prevention of packaging waste and a reduction in the use of packaging, where possible.

The Packaging Waste Prevention Programme (PWPP) is part of the National Waste Prevention Programme and has been co-funded by Repak and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with the support of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG).

The aim of the programme is to assist Irish businesses with positive and practical ways to reduce packaging and to promote those achievements to a wider audience.

Apart from developing these specific measures within the Packaging Waste Prevention Programme, Repak is working very closely with the Irish retail sector.

The programme measures include studies, publications, seminars, best practice initiatives and the Repak Recycling Awards, which highlight examples of how Repak members are implementing Prevention Initiatives and including waste prevention as part of their normal operations.

Other measures of the programme include the development of a 'Packaging Waste Prevention Training Course' and the compilation of this 'Packaging Improvement Toolkit'. Both of these measures are designed to equip participants to make significant changes in their own companies with regard to excessive packaging where it exists.

Apart from developing these specific measures within the Packaging Waste Prevention Programme, Repak is working very closely with the Irish retail sector and other specific sectors within the manufacturing industry to

examine ways of preventing the growth of packaging and to reduce the amount of packaging waste going to landfill. The aim of this co-ordinated approach is to encourage all key players to optimise their packaging systems and to provide them with the tools to allow them to achieve this.

There are already economic incentives to reduce excess packaging. Businesses are consistently looking to reduce their product costs while Repak's "pay by weight" fee structure is designed to discourage companies from producing excess packaging.

The challenge now facing business is to achieve a balance between reducing the volume of packaging used while still serving customers needs. We hope that this toolkit will show some of the methods that can be used to address this challenge.



Repak and Packaging Waste Prevention

As well as helping Irish businesses to recycle their packaging, Repak is committed to reducing the amount of packaging placed onto the Irish market. This will also help to increase the packaging recycling rate in Ireland that Repak is measured against.

This recycling rate is derived from the amount of packaging material recycled by Irish businesses and consumers, divided by the amount of packaging waste arising onto the market. Both figures are measured annually.

$$\text{Packaging Recycling Rate} = \frac{\text{Packaging Material Recycled}}{\text{Packaging Waste Arising on Irish Market}}$$

In the last few years, there has been a lot of emphasis on increasing the amount of packaging material recycled. However some of the gains made with this strategy have been off-set by a corresponding increase in the amount of packaging waste arising on the Irish market. The best way to increase the Packaging Recycling Rate is to continue to increase the amount of packaging material recycled, while at the same time, decreasing the amount of packaging arising on the Irish market.

Repak also recognised that to reduce the amount of packaging arising onto the Irish market, businesses must fully understand how their packaging works before they can recognise what could be removed or minimised. To this end, Repak initiated a Packaging Technology Service in 2007.

Packaging Technologists are now available at Repak to advise members on the use of packaging materials, ways to optimise packaging throughout the supply chain and ways of managing packaging once it is no longer required. This is communicated through site visits, publication of newsletters and case studies and the provision of various tools to help members optimise their packaging and reduce their packaging waste.

The publication of this toolkit is another step in this communication process. The booklet explains the background to packaging waste prevention and



minimisation, discusses the importance of packaging and suggests an improvement strategy for business to use when optimising their packaging.

At the back of this booklet are a number of 'Prevention Tools' which can be used to optimise packaging or reduce packaging waste. The tools are presented in a generic way, so that businesses can consider if a tool is suitable for them or not.

At the back of each toolkit example there are a number of case-studies which show how such tools have been employed by various businesses in recent times. Where possible we have tried to include a variety of methods and packaging materials and have also included examples involving primary, secondary and tertiary packaging. These examples will be available on our web-site www.preventandsave.ie and will be added to periodically.