



UNDER-PACKAGING IS 10 TIMES WORSE THAN OVER-PACKAGING

Food waste levels are shocking but no-one is doing more to reduce them than the packaging industry.

Supermarkets and their suppliers are reducing packaging but, more importantly they are making sure they use enough packaging to help stop food waste which is a much bigger problem.

Over 6 million tonnes of food goes to waste each year from households. Good packaging helps prevent this by keeping food fresh for longer and by helping us buy food in portion sizes that suit our needs. See notes to editors below.

The LGA (Local Government Association's) recent survey found that 5% of the weight of the shopping basket is packaging. But weight isn't the only measure of environmental impact. Carbon footprint is also important. So too is using recycled content (which means the packaging needs to be heavier to do the same job).

Perhaps surprisingly, some packaging has to weigh more than its contents or it couldn't do its job. Champagne needs to be packed in a bottle that is 95% of the total weight or it wouldn't survive the journey from the vineyard to home, let alone contain bubbles. On the other hand, some packaging is much lighter - butter wrapping is only 1% of the product.

Jane Bickerstaffe, Director of INCPEN points out, "If products are damaged or spoiled as a result of inadequate packaging, all the energy and materials in those products are lost."

"If we didn't have packaging, landfills would be a great deal fuller, with damaged goods and spoiled food. Used household packaging occupies less than 3% of landfill space and companies are working to reduce it further."

"It's a shame that the LGA's survey did not follow on and look at how much food arrived home in good condition and how much ended up as waste. After all the whole point of packaging is to make sure the food is safe and wholesome all the way through to when it's consumed."

"It would also have been helpful if the survey had explained that far from being "rubbish" the packaging saved far more waste than it generated. It should also have explained that recycling has its own environmental impact because energy and materials are used to collect, sort and clean the items for recycling. There is always going to be some packaging and other waste that shouldn't be recycled because it will have a negative environmental impact."

"The good news is - UK recycling rates are increasing all the time thanks to the efforts of councils and we use less packaging per person than many other European countries."

"That said, there are some examples of excessive use of packaging. A proven way to get rid of them is to establish a multi-stakeholder group to act as forum for consumers' complaints and provide companies with technical advice. Join INCPEN's campaign for a Packaging Watchdog."

Ends

Notes to editors:

- **Of the total energy used in the food chain, 50% is used in food production, 10% on transport to the shops and retailing, 10% to make the packaging and the remaining 30% used by shoppers to drive to the shops and store and cook food.**
- **The UK uses less packaging per person than most EU countries** – 171 kg per capita in 2004 compared with 188 kg for Germany, 198 kg for the Netherlands and 200 kg for France. (Source: EU Commission).
- **The amount of packaging used in the UK has increased by less than 4% since 1999 (8.5 to 8.8 million tonnes, in 2004 – excluding wood).** This increase is more than accounted for by factors outside industry's control such as the increase in population and demographic shift to more people living alone. **In the same period, GDP has grown by 17% and household expenditure by 20%.**
- **Packaging has grown less in the only 2 member states (UK, France) that enforce the Essential Requirements Regulations than in all the other “old” pre-2004 14 EU countries.** (Source: European Commission)
- Eliminating packaging from fresh fruit and vegetables can lead to increased product waste. A study that compared apples sold loose with four in a shrink-wrapped tray showed that there was **27% more waste (bruised apple and used packaging) from orchard to home from those sold loose.** (Source: ERM)
- Cucumber Growers' Association tests show that unwrapped cucumbers are unsaleable after 3 days; just 1.5 grams of plastic wrapping (and 0.4 grams of paper label) keeps them fresh for 14 days and untouched by dirty hands.
- **Most supermarkets offer a choice of pre-packed and loose fruit and vegetables** – consumers can choose what suits their needs and preferences. It's environmentally beneficial to use a few grams of packaging to prevent damage to food. **In the UK packaging used for fresh produce accounts for less than 0.9% of all sales packaging, equivalent to 0.1% of household waste.**
- **Almost 60% of used packaging was recycled in 2006** – 5.5 million tonnes - up from 27% in 1998. **Since 1998 companies have spent £700 million on increasing recycling.** (Source: DEFRA).
- **It's not enough to design packaging for recycling alone.** Recycling has the potential to minimise environmental impact but it is more important to **aim for minimum use of materials and energy.** (One of the most effective ways to reduce material and energy use is to combine small amounts of 2,3 or more layers of different materials to provide the same level of protection as one thicker, single-material. There may not be any environmental benefit in recycling the multilayer packaging but it can be the most resource-efficient option by reducing material and energy use in production and distribution, reducing the number of lorries needed for transport, allowing the use of sea miles instead of air miles and energy can be recovered after use.)
- **By law, councils have to meet targets to divert biodegradable household waste from landfill.** Glass, metals and most plastics are not biodegradable so this doesn't affect them. Paper is biodegradable but paper packaging is only 5% of household waste. Most of the biodegradable materials in household waste are newspaper and magazines and food waste.