



Sustainable Packaging Alliance Round Table Series

Recycling Packaging: The Challenges Ahead

Thursday 9th March 2006

Background

The overarching targets of the National Packaging Covenant (2005-2010) are:

- Increased recycling of post consumer packaging (paper & cardboard 70-80%; glass 50-60%; steel 60-65%; aluminium 70-75%; plastics 30-35%);
- Increased recycling rate for 'non-recyclable' packaging (plastics coded 4 to 7 and non-recyclable paper & cardboard packaging); and
- No increase in the amount of packaging disposed of to landfill (baseline 2003).

Targets have been set for each individual material category and substantial increases in the capture of packaging materials from 'Away from Home' will be needed to ensure that these targets are met. There will also be a need to update and expand collection, sorting and reprocessing infrastructure throughout Australia to meet the targets.

This Round Table discussed the current status of collection, sorting and reprocessing systems for recyclable and 'non-recyclable' packaging materials and the challenges that the packaging industry and governments face in meeting these targets. What actually happens in a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) and how are the different packaging materials processed? What are the gaps and how will they be overcome?

This report provides a summary of the presentations and discussions in the 9th SPA Round Table.

Recycling Overview

Ed Cordner (National Packaging Covenant Council) discussed the second National Packaging Covenant, which expresses the need to include performance data. A number of Key Performance Indicators have been introduced many of which relate directly to industry. One of the first tasks to be completed will be the establishment of baseline data and continuous improvement objectives. The covenant must be able to deliver quantifiable outcomes in order to analyse and report upon its effectiveness. The NPC Council is working hard to ensure that the requirements for signatories to the NPC are not overly onerous. However data collection and reporting are critical, and if the information generated in the next 3-5 years is of insufficient quality then the entire process will fail. Ed's advice to companies is not to expect it to be perfect in year one – build in continuous improvement.

Laurie Bertelle (SKM Recycling) gave participants an insight into what happens inside a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). The aim of SKM's operation is to sort recyclables to add value. Laurie discussed how MRFs deal with contaminants and recyclables and barriers that currently exist to inhibit effective sorting. Recycling education programs, which assist residents to reduce contamination rates, were also discussed. Investment in technologies to assist in refining sorting was seen as important to obtain maximum value from waste products.



Networking lunch

Tackling “non-recyclables”

Peter Bury (PACIA) reported on the recovery and recycling of plastics coded 4-7. For all plastics, the NPC has set a recycling target of 30-35%. Peter discussed how recycling rates for plastics can be increased without further increases to landfill by cooperatively working across the supply chain and the setting of clear performance goals. Examples were provided of engagement of recovery chain participants through industry projects which shared technical knowledge and created partnerships. Concerns and opportunities were addressed through providing technical, market, pricing and volume information. Peter stated that market forces would open new markets and niches for previously un-recycled plastics.

Colin Fisher (Visy Recycling) described how Visy invests in technology in order to enhance recovery. Colin described how surveys have reported that 80% of people indicated that they would recycle if it were easier. Clear and consistent labels are required to uncomplicate the process for many people. Colin said that post consumer use should be a major consideration in packaging design.

Dr Russell Peel (Beverage Industry Environment Council) spoke about the challenges for “away from home” (AFH) recycling. It is estimated that 50% of packaging is consumed AFH. Russell discussed the similarities and differences that exist between kerbside and AFH recycling including looking at waste type, collection process, contamination rates, facilities required, end products and government regulation. Some of the new technologies being used to tackle AFH recycling issues both by governments and private companies were examined. Finally, Russell looked at some of the barriers to AFH recycling and how these could be overcome.

Outcomes and Learnings

This Round Table highlighted the interest in recycling technology across the entire supply chain. The NPC has resulted in change in all areas of the packaging supply chain and we must continue to build relationships to obtain maximum results. Market forces and commercial considerations are major factors in driving change for many companies. Benchmarking through data collection will allow informed decision making for positive change. Consumers are an important link in the chain - it is important to provide them with clear consistent messages.

Find out more

A full report including copies of the presentations and details of the round table discussion feedback, conclusions and learnings is available in PDF format at a cost of \$125 + 10% GST.

For further information or to order your copy of the full report please contact: Robert Jordon on (03) 9681 8199 or robert@sustainablepack.org