

LOW PACKAGING AISLES

Packaging is a big problem

- The average UK household spends one sixth of its food budget on packaging (about £470 a year)
- More than 10 million tonnes of packaging waste is generated in the UK every year
- In 21 years, supermarkets have given us enough plastic bags to cover the whole of England
- Mixed materials in much packaging make it difficult to recycle and most ends up in landfill.

The Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations 2003 oblige stores and manufacturers to keep packaging to a minimum.

WEN believes businesses could do more to enable consumers to buy less packaging. There would be public support: a National Consumer Council survey in 2003 showed consumers want legislation for sustainable production and consumption, with which industry must comply.

What is a low packaging aisle?

An aisle or area in a store set aside for products with little or no packaging, in the same way that organic or fair trade goods are often displayed together.

The aim is to encourage retailers to lead by example and enable consumers to choose less wastefully wrapped products.

Promotional aisles could be set up temporarily until the low packaging idea becomes more mainstream; then retailers could display 'low wrap' or 'no wrap' items across the store with, for instance, a low packaging logo on them.

Ideas that could be trialled in a low packaging aisle include:

- Re-usable promotional boards advertising low packaging aisles
- Smaller packages (Easter eggs are a good example of excessive packaging)
- No outer packaging (as for toothpaste)
- Solid products such as shampoo which don't need a bottle
- Items transported and displayed in removable transit containers (these are boxes that hold and protect items for transit and display which are kept in the shop).
- Vending machines to dispense liquids into your own container (e.g. at the supermarket Fresh and Wild you can fill up your own bottle with filtered water)
- Refillable bottles with a deposit
- Products you weigh out yourself into a thin bag, meaning you can buy in bulk instead of lots of small packages
- Unpackaged goods with a label only

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Could low packaging aisles really work?

Some retailers may be sceptical but there are significant benefits for them:

- making, using and transporting fewer materials will cut costs;
- lower costs mean improved profit margins and/or more competitive pricing
- a better reputation for environmental awareness
- new business and marketing opportunities for low-wrap or no wrap goods
- helps to comply with producer responsibility regulations

In recent years, many food and beverage manufacturers have made a variety of changes in packaging without compromising the integrity of the product or contravening health and safety measures.

In 2000 a major review of packaging used on Sainsbury's own-brand products identified potential savings. Particular successes include saving 66 tonnes of cardboard by removing the outer packaging on own-brand dried pulses and 14.7 tonnes of plastic saved by removing the tray on own-brand soya mince. Following a complete review of the size of every pack, and the configuration of cases per pallet, Sainsbury's removed 98 tonnes of packaging from its own-brand breakfast cereal range¹.

Stores could work with their local councils on this type of initiative. By jointly monitoring and promoting the amount of waste saved through low packaging aisles, councils would increase the likelihood of meeting their recycling targets and begin to tackle rising waste amounts and stores could improve profits through increasing their local profile.

Useful Contacts

Envirowise: www.envirowise.co.uk Helpline: 0800 585 794

Offer independent waste prevention advice and services to business. They produce a number of case studies which set out the case for reduced packaging. See for example "Reducing the cost of packaging in the food and drink industry" (GG157)

WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme): www.wrap.org.uk

Established in 2001 in response to the UK Government's Waste Strategy 2000 to promote sustainable waste management. The Retailer Initiative was established as a result of research undertaken by WRAP on behalf of the Strategy Unit, which found that as much as 35-40% of household waste, which ultimately ends up in landfill, has originated from a purchase from the top 5 retail supermarket chains

National Resource and Waste Forum (NRWF) www.nrwf.org.uk

Have produced a Household Waste Prevention Toolkit for use by Local Authorities, Community Groups and any other bodies and individuals interested in developing and implementing Waste Prevention Strategies at a local level.
(see also www.the-environment-council.org.uk)

Women's Environmental Network www.wen.org.uk

PO Box 30626, London, E1 1TZ

Tel: 020 7481 9004 email: waste2@wen.org.uk

¹ J Sainsbury plc, Environment Report 2000 p.12