SUSTAINABILITY: Take 5 Steps to Make Your Product Packaging More Sustainable



The trend is to make manufacturers more responsible for their end products, such as requiring them to oversee or pay for the recycling of products such as electronics and waste paint. This trend may be expanded to include product packaging. The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME), a quasi-governmental body made up of the federal, provincial and territorial ministers of the environment, published a Canadian Code of Preferred Packaging Practices ('Code') designed to help companies reduce the waste associated with the packaging of the items they produce. Here's a look at the five steps that the Code recommends companies take.

CODE OF PREFERRED PACKAGING PRACTICES

In 1989, the CCME established a National Packaging Task Force comprised of representatives from federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, industry, consumer and environmental groups to develop national policies for reducing the environmental impact of packaging. The Task Force developed the National Packaging Protocol, which was endorsed by the CCME in March 1990. The Code was published by the Task Force and based on the Protocol, which has six key principles:

- 1. All packaging shall have minimal effects on the environment;

- 2. Priority will be given to the management of packaging through source reduction, reuse and recycling;
- 3. A continuing campaign of information and education will be undertaken to make all Canadians aware of the function and environmental impacts of packaging;
- 4. These policies will apply to all packaging used in Canada, including imports;
- 5. Regulations will be implemented as necessary to achieve compliance with these policies; and
- 6. All government policies and practices affecting packaging will be consistent with these national policies.

***Insider* Says:** Compliance with the Code is voluntary but may help you comply with waste reduction regulations. For example, Ontario's *Packaging Audits and Packaging Reduction Work Plans Regulation* requires certain establishments, including large food and beverage manufacturers, paper manufacturers and chemical manufacturers, to implement plans designed to reduce the amount of waste resulting from packaging. Following the steps spelled out in the Code will help such manufacturers do so.

TAKE 5 STEPS

The Code recommends that companies develop an action plan detailing the steps to be taken to implement the Code's practices throughout their organizations. The key recommended steps for implementing the Code include:

[learn_more caption="Step #1: Identify All Packaging"]

The Code is intended to apply to a wide variety of types of packaging. So first identify all packaging that's produced, used or disposed of by the company, including:

- Packaging from raw materials that are used in the company's operations, such as cartons, boxes and pallets;

- Packaging for products manufactured by the company, including containers, transportation packaging, etc.
- Packaging from other products or materials that enter the workplace, such as from cleaning products, food services, office products, etc.; and
- Other packaging, such as envelopes and associated packaging materials from internal mail, couriers, etc.

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[learn_more caption="Step #2: Adopt a Code of Practice for the Identified Packaging"]

Adopt your own code of practice or use an industry specific code for the design, use and marketing of products and packaging. Your adopted code should be consistent with the recommended practices included in the Code and the National Packaging Protocol and include:

- Regular reviews of packaging;
- Realistic minimum levels of packaging, with the understanding that in some areas (such as the transportation of dangerous goods) that are regulated minimum packaging standards;
- Waste diversion targets;
- Priority given to the reduction and elimination of packaging;
- Reliance on the 'Three Rs' (discussed below) when making packaging decisions;
- Implementation of processes and practices, including purchasing, consistent with the Code and its principles; and
- Research and development into the creation of products, processes and packages that will lead to the reduction, reuse and recycling of packaging materials.

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[learn_more caption="Step #3: Implement the Code "]

Implement your adopted code within your organization based on the hierarchy of the ‘Three Rs’ (see the box at the end for more details.) That is, consider:

- Source **reduction** possibilities, such as elimination, life extension and bulk packaging;
- **Reuse** possibilities of packaging; and
- **Recycling** possibilities, including both the recycling of packaging and incorporation of recycled content into the packaging.

PACKAGING QUESTIONNAIRE: Download and use this questionnaire to help you evaluate your operations and implement the Code with this hierarchy in mind.

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[learn_more caption=”Step #4: Get Employees’ Support”]

Your efforts to make packaging more sustainable will fail unless you get the support of all the employees in the organization process, especially during implementation. So ensure that all employees at all levels of the organization’including reception of goods, manufacturing, maintenance, marketing and shipping’understand and apply your adopted code of practice for packaging.

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[learn_more caption=”Step #5: Document Actions and Results Related to Packaging Waste”]

Identify and document all actions and results in the organization relating to packaging waste to ensure that the results can be used to demonstrate the success of the code’s implementation or to identify defects or gaps that should be addressed.

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BOTTOM LINE

Sustainability is becoming more important to consumers, shareholders and government. The days when companies could ignore the amount of waste they generate are long gone. Because the packaging of products is a big source of such waste, consider implementing the steps from the Code and making an effort to reduce the packaging waste generated by your company.

INSIDER SOURCE

Canadian Code of Preferred Packaging Practices, The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME)

The Three Rs

According to the Code, in reviewing packaging and identifying opportunities for waste diversion, there's a hierarchy of options'the Three Rs'that should be considered in this order to ensure the best maximum diversion in the most cost-effective manner:

Reduction. The preferred option is reduction, including elimination, at the source. The goal is to use the minimum amount of packaging that's consistent with functional requirements, such as protecting the product during shipping, etc. You can achieve source reduction by:

- Total elimination of packaging;
- Elimination of certain packaging components; and
- Redesigning the packaging or the product itself.

Reuse. If reduction isn't feasible, reuse is the second favoured option. To maximize the waste diversion potential, primary reuse is preferred, which means the packaging is reused for its originally intended purpose. For example, shipping boxes are reused to ship other items. If primary reuse isn't practical, consider the potential for the

packaging or its components to safely be reused or refilled.

Recycling. Recycling is the last and least preferred option. The goal is whenever possible and to the maximum extent, to use recycled content in the production of packaging materials. Primary or ‘closed loop’ recycling, where the material is recycled into its original material or container form, is the preferred option, provided that all health and other regulatory requirements are met. Recycling into some other packaging form’secondary recycling’is also a viable option. Recycling into something other than a package or packaging material’tertiary recycling’may be the only available option for some materials, however.