



Circular Thinking

ECR COMMUNITY RECENTLY TEAMED UP WITH THE WORLD PACKAGING ORGANISATION ON A GUIDE THAT SEEKS TO ASSIST FIRMS WITH THE TRANSITION TO 'CIRCULAR' PACKAGING. CONOR FARRELLY REPORTS.

ESM recently caught up with Nerida Kelton, vice-president of Sustainability & Save Food at the World Packaging Organisation (WPO), following the recent launch of the *Global Packaging Design for Recycling Guide* by ECR Community and the WPO. The document aims to present a comprehensible guide to circular packaging, helping companies transition to new packaging designs that help to minimise their environmental impact, while ensuring packaging remains fit for purpose and continues to look good.

ESM: Changing a product's packaging isn't something that can be done overnight and requires lengthy collaboration in the supply chain. How does the guide help simplify this process?

Nerida Kelton: The *Global Packaging Design for Recycling Guide* is a starting point to understand best-practice examples, using state-of-the-art technology that can then be applied and tailored to suit recovery and recyclability capabilities and infrastructure on a regional and local level. The guide can be applied to products from the food, near-food and non-food segments, and it is applicable to all primary, secondary and ter-

tiary packaging – provided that product-specific regulations of the packaging system are observed.

Design for recycling is part of circular product design and represents an important basis for holistic sustainability assessment. Accordingly, circularity means that the packaging is designed in such a way that the highest-possible recycling of the materials in use can be achieved. The goals here are resource conservation, the longest-possible service life, material-identical recycling – closed-loop recycling – or the use of renewable materials.

Circular packaging should therefore be designed and manufactured in such a way that it can be reused – a fully reusable solution – and/or that the raw materials used can be reused, to a large extent, as secondary raw materials after the use phase – recycling – and/or consist of renewable raw materials.

In order to be able to apply recyclable packaging design, a certain fundamental knowledge of sorting and recycling processes is necessary. Packaging must, therefore, be suitable for state-of-the-art sorting and recycling processes in addition to its basic functions, e.g. storage, transport, product protection, product presentation, and convenience.

In terms of implementing renewable packaging and promoting a circular economy mindset, do you believe that the emphasis should be on legislation through the EU and other legislative bodies, or should companies take the initiative themselves?

All companies across the globe have a responsibility to design out their waste at the start of the design process, reduce single-use plastic, eliminate problematic materials, and ensure that their packaging is as circular as possible. Each company will need to follow the targets and legislations in the country in which they sell their products, to ensure that they meet the local recovery and recyclability capabilities and infrastructure.

I would strongly encourage companies that are new to this approach to look for best-practice examples across the world that showcase sustainable and circular packaging design.

The use of a traffic light system in the guide aims to make it easier for manufacturers to understand what materials and designs to use. Could this be also introduced on packaging?

Many countries around the world use decision trees and traffic light systems for packaging design, so this is a global model that most people are comfortable with using.

As for on-pack guidelines, one can look at on-pack labelling systems such as How2Recycle in the US, the Australasian Recycling Labelling (ARL) programme, in Australia and New Zealand, and the On-Pack Recycling Label (OPRL) programme in the UK for effective ways to communicate to consumers.

Several concepts discussed would have been an ‘impossible pipe dream’ until recently, according to the authors. With that in mind, how soon do you think the recommendations can be implemented?

There are a number of WPO members and ECR Community members already sharing and using the guide across the globe, which is great news. There are many others who are working to translate the guide into their own languages, such as Spanish, French, Hungarian, Georgian, Portuguese, and more.

In addition, the WPO and ECR Community are talking to many organisations across the globe that want their own guide developed, to suit their local recycling and recovery infrastructure and capabilities. There are some exciting times ahead for the project.

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Nerida Kelton
World Packaging Organisation

There’s a broad mix of countries in the 53 members of the WPO, but for those who are non-members, is it hoped that they too will look to follow the design guide?

Of course, as this guide has been designed for everyone to use. The traffic light system has been developed to ensure that anyone can pick up the guide and understand the process. You do not need to be a technically qualified packaging technologist to use the guide. This guideline is just the first step towards a common

global understanding and the harmonisation of circular packaging design.

Some countries or regions might not have sufficient technology to ensure that materials can be recycled. Could that lead to an uneven playing field?

Whilst the common thread across all countries is a shift towards a more circular economy and the move to design out waste and pollution, every region and country, naturally, differs in approach.

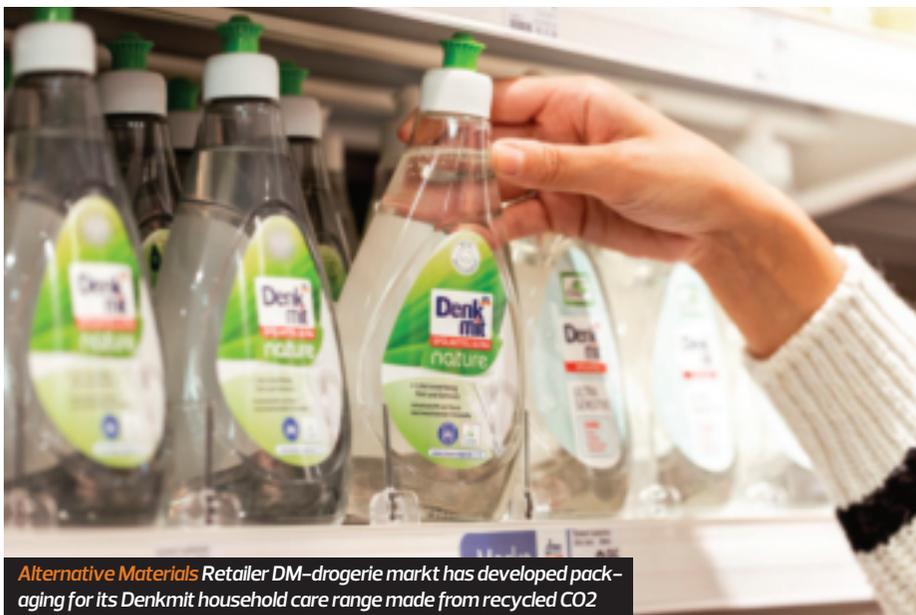


- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).** Extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging is gaining global attention and adoption. This brings to the forefront the need to harmonise EPR across diverse regions, especially given the global interconnectedness of the economy and consumer packaged goods markets. There are many different approaches to this strategy, and many go beyond providing end-of-life services to promote responsible product design, infrastructure improvements, and market development.

- **Eco-Modulation.** In Europe, particularly, there is a move to eco-modulation within governments and product stewardship or EPR schemes. In the simplest of terms, it is a programme that penalises the producers of problematic materials and difficult-to-recycle packaging, and it provides incentives for materials that are recyclable and recoverable.

- **Deposit Return/Container Deposit Schemes.** The introduction of more deposit return or container deposit schemes around the world is recognition that they play an important role for collection and recycling of beverage containers such as bottles and cans. Deposit return schemes enable consumers to be incentivised to recycle for an economic gain and to improve collection rates. ■

For more information, or to download a copy of the *Global Circular Packaging Design Guide*, visit bit.ly/3q3UKgW



Alternative Materials Retailer DM-drogerie markt has developed packaging for its Denkit household care range made from recycled CO2