

Metal Packaging Manufacturers Association (MPMA)

The Metal Packaging Manufacturers Association is the lead voice of the UK metal packaging industry with direct links into a European market employing 177,000 people across 760 companies producing over 98 billion containers each year. The Association supports and represents members' interests on industry matters related to operational, regulatory and environmental issues.

In addition, the work of the Association promotes the benefits of metal packaging and the sustainable attributes of steel and aluminium through education programmes, industry awards and relevant communication channels.

The MPMA is run by a small management team which operates through committees and working groups made up of representatives from member companies, and reports to a members' Council.

Areas for Consideration

Like the CMA the MPMA strongly believes that green claims should be truthful and accurate, clear and unambiguous, and must not omit or hide important relevant information. In addition, comparisons between packaging types and materials must be not only be fair and meaningful but must also consider the full life cycle of the product. Finally, all claims must be able to be substantiated.

However, the MPMA has become concerned over recent years about how often the findings of quoted LCA's appear to have been modified by the careful selection of system boundaries or special conditions in order to return the desired outcome for those commissioning the assessment. Consumers cannot be expected to be well informed and thus make value judgements if they are being exposed to misleading and often conflicting information.

We are also concerned that when the carbon related to packaging is assessed it is often only the carbon expended in the production of the packaging that appears to be taken into account and not the carbon generation avoided by the use of the packaging.

A good example is food waste. Packaging significantly reduces food waste¹, and given that the methane generated when food decomposes has well over 20 times the global warming potential of CO₂ the importance of this cannot be overestimated. In addition, according to WRAP the GHG's related to food production and manufacture in the UK accounts for around 67% of the UK's total annual food supply chain GHG emissions. By comparison, packaging accounts for around 3.3%. Thus, if food is allowed to spoil not only is there additional production of GHG's but also all the GHG's associated with the food production are also wasted. Thus from a food waste perspective packaging is very much part of the solution and not part of the problem.

In the case of metal food cans, shelf life is typically 3-5 years resulting in very little food waste. Also, food packed in cans requires no refrigeration at any time in the supply chain so avoiding considerable amounts of refrigeration related CO₂ being generated. Thus, if an LCA assessment of a piece of packaging fails to take into account the benefits as well as the deficits of that packaging then the resulting conclusions could be highly misleading to the consumer.

In section 1.25 of the CMA's consultation document it describes the situation of "greenhushing". It could be argued that a form of greenhushing is being proposed in the EPR consultation whereby the recyclability labelling would be restricted to "Recycle" and "Don't Recycle". This approach groups all recyclable materials together irrespective of how recyclable they are and how many recycling turns they are actually capable of making.

There is no upper band to inform the consumer that two of the standard packaging materials, metal and glass are in fact infinitely recyclable with both being formally classified as permanently available materials² due to the fact that they lose no quality during their recycling.

As society strives towards a true circular economy we believe that this level of granularity could be a valuable addition to ensure the consumer has all the information on which to base his or her decisions.

To reflect this formal classification the metal packaging sector across Europe has developed its own logo that aims to provide the consumer with more information about this characteristic of metal.



The industry has conducted several consumer surveys that have returned very positive results with regard to the value of this logo and the fact that it provides real information.

¹ According the United Nations Food and Agriculture group nearly a third of all the food produced globally each for human consumption is lost or wasted.

²British Standard BS 8905:2011: Framework for the assessment of the sustainable use of materials.