



Empowering Communities, Advocating Solutions.

**Governor's Task Force on Consumer Packaging
Reducing Consumer Packaging and Solid Waste
DEEP HQ, 79 Elm St.
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According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, food packaging accounts for up to 23% of all the material going into landfills in the United States. Additionally, packaging makes up much of the trash we find littering our beaches, open spaces and waterways. Waste packaging can contribute to additional greenhouse gas emissions, costly impacts to infrastructure, and adverse impacts to hundreds of species of fish, birds and other aquatic life.

There are a plethora of strategies Connecticut can adopt to reduce the amount of waste packaging used in manufacturing and handling consumer goods. Most fall under one of the three main packaging reduction strategies:

- Source reduction (preventing waste before it is created)
- Reuse
- Recycling/composting

This means that by using simple, common-sense strategies to change business and marketing habits, we can change the way we package food and other consumer commodities. Some approaches include policy solutions state and local governments can take, while others incorporate best practices for businesses and other establishments. Each of the following strategies requires a robust public education component.

Policy Solutions

✓ **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Models**

By requiring that manufacturers offer recycling services for the various types of packaging that come with their products, we obligate them to internalize the costs of the pollution they produce. This in turn incentivizes manufacturers to use less excess packaging in order to keep their operations as cost-effective as possible. (ex: In 1994, the European Union established a requirement that manufacturers take back/recycle a minimum of 60% of their packaging waste, shifting the burden away off of consumers and municipalities.)

Product stewardship approaches such as EPR programs are designed to establish built in mechanisms to reduce adverse environmental impacts, both at the time of disposal, along with every other step of the manufacturing process. While this model has not been tested extensively for consumer packaging in the U.S., there are examples from around the world we

can point to that demonstrate the efficacy of this approach. For example, in Germany (a global pioneer in EPR laws for packaging) toothpaste tubes are no longer sold in cardboard packaging¹.

British Columbia developed a packaging and printed paper (PPP) stewardship plan in 2012 that shifts the responsibility for collecting and processing PPP from local governments to Multi-Material British Columbia (MMBC)- a stewardship organization formed to facilitate an EPR plan for producers under the new stewardship regulations. The program is aimed at rewarding producers that supply high-end recyclable PPP for which there is “market demand and high commodity value” to incentivize reduction, redesign and improved recyclability².

Another area where EPR programs have had proven success driving green design is in electronics recycling. There are ample examples in the U.S., Japan and Europe of many leading electronics manufacturers began making significant changes in their manufacturing and marketing practices, within just a few years of electronics recycling policies being enacted³. Based on the success of EPR programs for electronic waste, there may be lessons that can be applied to consumer packaging as well.

✓ **Expand Recycling & Composting Access**

Work with state and local governments to expand convenient access to recycling and composting programs for a variety of material types. By making recycling and composting options widely available, it becomes easier for the average consumer to get rid of excess packaging and food wastes.

✓ **Modernize & Expand Connecticut’s Container Deposit Model**

Connecticut’s 5-cent deposit on beer bottles, soda cans and bottled water is a proven, effective system for incentivizing recycling and reducing litter from single-serve beverage containers in our communities. Unfortunately, this policy has not been updated to keep the pace with inflation and changing market trends in over 30 years. Connecticut should modernize this policy by increasing the container deposit from 5-10 cents on each covered container, and by expanding the program to include juices, teas, wine & liquor bottles and other non-carbonated beverage containers.

Additionally, the container deposit system could easily be applied to other types of product packaging, including glass jars, plastic bins, etc. This would help increase recycling of many different types of consumer packaging, both cutting down on the amount of waste going into incinerators and landfills and incentivizing the use of higher quality recyclables for packaging purposes.

Best Management Practices for Businesses

✓ **Expand the Use of Self-Serve Groceries**

By shifting retail sales of food commodities towards self-serve packaging (similar to the way many stores sell candy, dried fruit, nuts, granola and other goods), grocery chains can significantly cut down on excess packaging waste. By providing scales and individual bags for dry goods and ingredients, consumers can choose the volume that makes sense for them, both cutting down on food waste and on excess packaging.

¹ Lynn Pledger, *Extended Producer Responsibility and Product Design*, Prepared by for Massachusetts Product Stewardship Council

² Multi-Material BC, *Packaging and Printed Paper Stewardship Plan*

³ Beverly Thorpe, *How Producer Responsibility for Product Take-Back can Promote Eco-Design*.
www.cleanproductionaction.org

- ✓ **Reusable Bags**
Retailers can cut down on plastic pollution and protect the environment by encouraging the use of reusable shopping bags. By either placing a fee on single-use paper and plastic bags or eliminating them altogether, retailers can help shift consumer behavior away from using environmentally harmful disposable bags and towards the use of their own reusable bags.
- ✓ **Reusable Packaging**
Shift towards using packaging that is completely recyclable, compostable or reusable. This includes the use of reusable plastic bins, instead of cardboard boxes, eliminating the use of low-grade plastic films, etc.
- ✓ **Reusable Tableware**
Using reusable plates and silverware helps reduce waste by cutting down on excess plastic, paper and other materials.
- ✓ **Composting**
Offer composting services at major grocery stores, restaurant dining rooms, cafeterias and public spaces to dramatically reduce food waste ending up in landfills.
- ✓ **Bulk Purchasing**
By purchasing food items in bulk, establishments can save money on their ingredients while cutting down on excess packaging and food waste.

Public Education

A robust public education campaign is a critical component of any effort to change consumer behavior and corporate practice. Social marketing techniques such as the use of billboards, social media and other kinds of advertising can be especially effective at educating the public on the importance of reducing consumer packaging, while explaining easy steps consumers can take to reduce their own impact.

It is important to note that while public education is critical, public education alone cannot achieve the packaging reduction goals outlined by this task force. Strong policy solutions are needed to ensure that business and industry make the transition towards using less packaging in a timely manner.