

PACKAGING'S CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMPTION



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The world is changing. Society is increasingly aware that consumption and production need to be more sustainable.

It is now generally recognised that the management of environmental impact must go hand in hand with social and economic considerations to achieve long term sustainability.

'We need a major shift to deliver new products and services with lower environmental impacts across their life cycle, while at the same time boosting competitiveness. And we need to build on people's growing awareness of social and environmental concerns, and the importance of their roles as citizens and consumers.'

Securing the Future, UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy 2005

However the interplay between the various factors influencing sustainability are complex and potential solutions are only beginning to be understood.

Concerns about impacts such as global climate change mean that ensuring the efficient use of energy and resources is paramount. Progressively less reliance on fossil fuels and more emphasis on developing a "low carbon economy" will have an effect on the whole product supply chain.

INCPEN'S VIEW

New ways of thinking about packaging and its role in the product supply chain are required to meet the challenges we face.

Society needs to feel confident that companies are responsible. Numerous studies have shown declining levels of trust in industry. Companies not only need to act but also need to be seen to be acting.

Society expects products and services that fulfil its needs whilst having the lowest possible environmental and social impact. Companies involved in the packaging and product supply chain¹ must help meet these expectations.

Packaging has to be considered in the context of the design and manufacture of the product, the supply chain and consumers' needs because these all dictate the functions required of the packaging. An advantage of considering the whole supply chain is that it opens the potential for finding better ways to meet the needs of society.

Industry is well placed for delivering change because it can work to a long-term vision. Decisions are taken today about capital investment in machinery that will have a life in excess of 10 years.

To deliver a sustainable future, industry needs the freedom to use all appropriate materials responsibly. No material has a monopoly of environmental virtues.

OUR VISION

INCPEN is a research organisation which draws together an influential group of companies who share a vision of the future where all production, distribution and consumption contribute to a truly sustainable society.

¹ We define a sustainable packaging and product supply chain as a system that enables goods to be produced, distributed, used and recovered with minimum environmental impact at lowest social and economic cost.

THE INCPEN SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT

INCPEN’s members commit to adopting cradle-to-cradle thinking² in developing packaging and product supply chains that make a positive contribution to social, environmental and economic development. Our ambition is to help consumers live sustainable lifestyles.

We will: -

- Commit to the vision and actions to achieve it
- Commit to measuring environmental improvement
- Monitor, share and evaluate progress every 2 years at a stakeholder seminar
- Promote sustainability initiatives to all supply chain companies
- Encourage the whole supply chain to go beyond the UK Essential Requirements Regulations’ focus on waste and recycling, by also considering product wastage, energy and transport (as in the INCPEN Responsible Packaging Code)
- Help consumers reduce their own environmental impact by continuing to support INCPEN initiatives such as the Living Smarter research, the Green Kitchen: recipes for a better planet, and the Packaging Education Programme
- Encourage and support innovations that contribute to a sustainable packaging and product supply chain.

INCPEN’S ROLE

INCPEN aims to foster the conditions to continuously improve the environmental footprint of product/packaging systems by: -

- Developing and promoting sound science to inform industry, policy makers and others in society
- Informing and working with a wide range of stakeholders to encourage development towards overall sustainability
- Spreading best practice among all interested parties
- Encouraging innovation in a sustainable packaging and product supply chain
- Developing a measurement system to track members’ progress on reducing environmental impacts.

INCPEN GOALS	ACTIONS (some examples)
Develop and promote sound scientific method and assessment to ensure evidence-based decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify R&D needs for the journey to a sustainable society - Continue to commission research and disseminate the findings tailored to different audiences - Lobby for better data on waste composition
Report on progress of members towards a sustainable future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a multi-stakeholder advisory body to advise on the steps necessary to achieve sustainability - Invite the advisory body to help monitor progress
Inform and work with UK and EU policy makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain and develop relationship with EU Commission, MEPs, UK government officials, Ministers, MPs - Be represented on key advisory bodies - Contribute to consultations
Act as a repository of insight and understanding and a catalyst for companies to share best practice in achieving the commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular communication between members via meetings, the newsletter etc. and also via the members only area of the new website which will include a discussion centre - Act as a forum to encourage and facilitate the adoption of innovations that improve the sustainability of the packaging and product supply chain
Engage in societal debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute to the debate on sustainability - Share our vision with stakeholders, including NGOs and local government; invite them to improve it - Develop and promote educational material - Promote establishment of a multi-stakeholder packaging consumer watchdog - Involve the INCPEN TAG (Trade Association Group)

² Cradle-to-cradle thinking is design that considers the entire lifecycle of packaging in the context of the product and the supply chain with the aim of optimising materials and energy flows and maximising recovery of value from waste.