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ECOLOGICAL LABELLING AND UTILIZATION OF USED PACKAGING IN POLAND

Submission by Poland

(Summary of the Text Prepared by the Polish Packaging Research and Development Centre)

1. The per capita weight of used packaging is close to 50 kg per person in Poland, hence three times less than the relevant figure for West European countries. Nevertheless, the lack of efficient systems of collection of used packaging and recycling provokes a serious threat to the environment in Poland. A large share of this used packaging comes with products imported from other countries. For example, it has been estimated that 35 million PVC bottles, 92 million PET bottles, 51 million metal cans and 10 million of various laminate packaging were imported from the EC countries to Poland in 1992.

2. This unfavorable situation and rising ecological requirements being gradually imposed on Polish exporters call for action. There are plans to elaborate and implement the system of eco-certificates for packaging and labelling in accordance with EC directives. The aim of the new system would be to limit the share of used packaging in the communal waste. The general principle, accepted by a majority of countries, should be that the economic entity introducing a packaging into the market should also be responsible for the recycling or destruction of this packaging.

3. The Polish Packaging Research and Development Centre, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Central Bureau of Quality Standards, taking into consideration the experience of other countries in this field, worked out a **general outline of a system of eco-certificates, which is based on the following concepts:**

- certificates should promote the utilization of environmentally friendly packaging;
- the certificate awarded to a product will authorize its producers and traders to use appropriate markings (eco-labelling);
- the possibility of recycling should be the basic criterion for granting the eco-certificate. Low energy and resource-intensity of production, utilization and recycling of packaging should serve as additional criteria;
- the detailed criteria for a group of packaging should be based on "life cycle analysis". This method should facilitate the selection of objective, quantitative criteria for a testing process. A sample of detailed criteria for specific groups of packaging is given below;

- the certificates should be awarded by an impartial testing research institution. A committee granting eco-certificates should be selected from among highly qualified experts representing industry, commerce and environmental protection;
- the eco-certificates should be granted for a period of one to three years, subject to extension. Within this period the institution granting certificates should periodically verify the fulfilment of the necessary requirements;
- eco-certificates and labelling should be optional. Exceptions to this can result only from separate regulations issued by the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

4. Below are examples of **proposed criteria for selected, specific groups of packaging materials.**

A. Packaging manufactured from paper and cardboard

- (a) Materials used for packaging should not be covered or impregnated by asphalt, paraffin, wax or other components hampering the recycling process or provoking pollution of the natural environment.
- (b) Waterproof and impregnating components hindering the recycling process should not be used for the production of packaging.
- (c) Paper and cardboard can only be coated by a surface of polyethylene not exceeding 15 grammes per square metre.
- (d) Only starch and other glues not hampering the recycling process or provoking pollution can be used to paste cardboard surfaces.
- (e) Glues based on vinyl polyacetate should not be used.
- (f) Varnishes, colouring including chlorine and paints unfriendly to the environment should not be used for the production of packaging materials.
- (g) Self-adhesive labels made of plastics should not be applied to paper and cardboard packaging.

B. Packaging manufactured from wood and timber palettes

- (a) Packaging and palettes manufactured from timber should not be painted or impregnated.
- (b) Pressed wood, plywood, fibreboard, particle board, or non-wood material with the exception of polypropylene plates "Tekpol" should not be used for production of packaging elements and palettes.

- (c) Cases of single-ply strengthened and closed with wire are admissible.
- (d) It is recommended to use single plate wooden palettes with four openings and without wings, size 1200:800 mms EUR. Such palettes as pooled can be exchanged and reused and do not require certification.
- (e) Other wooden palettes should not be equipped with elements of plastic or other material.

C. Packaging manufactured from plastics

The following packaging materials are allowed:

- (a) viscose foil;
- (b) flexible polyolephines;
- (c) stiff and semi-stiff polyolephines in the form of boxes, barrels, containers, jars, mugs, plates, covers for glass containers;
- (d) polystyrene, including low and high-impact polystyrene foil and oriented foil;
- (e) shock-absorbing inserts, packaging and filling (untinted);
- (f) polyester in the form of bottles and jars with a preference for reusable containers.

The following packaging should be avoided:

- (g) with painted surfaces (except for the necessary markings made with "environmentally friendly" paints);
- (h) labels made of materials other than those used for the packaging itself (except loose labels or labels attached with a water-soluble glue);
- (i) colouring of packaging with substances other than "environment friendly" colour concentrates not hampering the recycling process;
- (j) PVC packaging should be avoided except when necessary (e.g. for pharmaceuticals).

A letter symbol of the plastic used should be permanently marked on the packaging. Polish packaging should be marked according to standard No. PN-87/C-89004 "Plastic products. Marks and marking".

D. Packaging manufactured from metal

- (a) The following metal-based materials are permitted for production of packaging materials: aluminium, aluminium sheet, tin plate, zinc sheet and carbon steel sheet.

- (b) Paints, varnishes and filling materials unfriendly to the environment should not be used in the production of packaging materials.
- (c) It is not recommended to produce packaging materials composed of two different kinds of metal (i.e. steel containers with aluminium covers).

E. Packaging manufactured from glass

- (a) Glass packaging (bottles) which can be reused and recycled.
- (b) Metallized packaging or glass mixed with metals should not be used for packaging purposes.
- (c) Glass packaging should not be covered by plastics.
- (d) The possibility of recycling used packaging depends on two factors:
 - glass packaging, including hardening materials cannot be recycled;
 - before recycling packaging should be appropriately sorted: colour and type of glass.

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The above-mentioned criteria for specific groups of packaging are reflecting foreign countries' requirements and domestic technological potential for recycling. These criteria will be updated according to changes in the technology of recycling. The results of "life-cycle analysis" should be taken into consideration.