

## Steel packaging and the circular economy: How to close the loop?

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Event Coverage

EU policymakers and stakeholders recently got together in Brussels to discuss how they could better work together on closing the recycling loop for steel packaging in Europe.



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The conference in Brussels on 11 April saw the launch of a new report by the Association of European Producers of Steel for Packaging (APEAL) examining best practices in the separate collecting, sorting and recycling of steel for packaging.

APEAL President Stéphane Tondo opened the conference - organised jointly with The Parliament Magazine and moderated by Robin Latchem, the former editor of industry magazine 'Materials Recycling World' - saying he hoped the report would, "be a reference point for the European

institutions and national, regional and municipal authorities”, with its examples and recommendations serving as a guide to improving recycling rates of steel for packaging.

He emphasised “the importance of recycling steel for the circular economy”, explaining that as a “permanent material, steel can be infinitely recycled without any loss to its intrinsic properties; thanks to its magnetic qualities it can be easily and economically sorted from waste streams.” These qualities were at the heart of a properly functioning circular economy.

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He told participants that its 77.5 per cent recycling rate (2015 data) made steel for packaging the most recycled packaging material in Europe. “The industry is aiming for 80 per cent by 2020”, said Tondo.

EU legislation on steel for packaging recycling includes the packaging and packaging waste directive and the waste framework directive.

Tondo said APEAL’s report was “timely”, as the European Commission’s circular economy package of five legislative proposals was close to adoption. (It was formally adopted last week).

The APEAL report recommends better source separation and separate packaging waste collection, creating a quality standard for steel packaging scrap, better and more transparent verification and reporting national recycling systems and roll-out of awareness-raising campaigns and activities for improving packaging scrap quality. “Increasing recycling requires a holistic approach”, said Tondo.

Finnish MEP Nils Torvalds echoed the need for a holistic approach to policymaking and avoid retreating into national perspectives. “We don’t see the whole issue,” he said. “Without all the interests around the table, you will have many players playing against you.”

Gwenole Cozigou, Director in the Commission’s DG Grow, described the new waste management targets as “ambitious, but realistic”. He added, “They must now become business opportunities and jobs.”

Some member states, he warned, could find it a challenge; finance from EU cohesion funds may be available to help. He called on stakeholders to pool knowledge and expertise to help the recycling industry implement the legislation.

“I hope the new APEAL report will be a reference point for the European institutions and national, regional and municipal authorities” **APEAL President Stéphane Tondo**

Eve Tamme, from the Permanent Representation of Estonia, explained the challenges her government faced in reaching agreement on the package.

"You literally have 28 different systems that you needed to harmonise," she said.

To avoid ending up with the lowest common denominator, the legislation had to have flexibility for member states. One of the circular economy package's strengths is its timeline up to 2035. This gives a long-term strategy for countries to define policies and measures and a clear signal to industry where we are going."

Outlining the best practices and benefits of separate collection, Joachim Quoden, Managing Director of the Extended Producer Responsibility Alliance (Expra) said that changed measurement criteria and tighter monitoring and reporting rules would have a "strong effect" on national waste packaging recycling rates.

"The new targets are reachable, but we will have stricter rules and controls on what is put on the market."

"One of the circular economy package's strengths is its timeline up to 2035. This gives a long-term strategy for countries to define policies and measures and a clear signal to industry where we are going" **Eve Tamme, Environmental Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Estonia**

He added that the circular economy package's waste legislation review was an opportunity to harmonise extended producer responsibility (EPR) rules and to promote best practices in collection.

Ella Stengler, managing director of the Confederation of European Waste-to-Energy Plants (CEWEP), also emphasised the importance of collection and sorting, arguing that source separation was key to quality recycling. One tonne of bottom ash can contain up to 12 per cent metals; annually around 1.4 million tonnes of iron is recovered from bottom ash.

"Unfortunately, waste-to-energy capacity is unevenly spread across the EU; many countries still rely heavily on landfilling and don't achieve high recycling targets."

Clare Broadbent, head of product sustainability at the World Steel Association, said the industry had been using circular economy principles for decades.

Recycling was "a fundamental part of the steel production process." She added that over 75 per cent of all steel ever produced is still in use today.

"Where we have efficient recovery systems in place, we can achieve over 90 per cent recycling rates", said Broadbent.

"Steel is a permanent material that can be infinitely recycled. Its inherent properties don't change; you can use steel for one product application, recycle it, keep the properties and use it again in a second, different application" **Clare Broadbent, head of product sustainability at the World Steel Association**

"Steel is a permanent material that can be infinitely recycled. Its inherent properties don't change; you can use steel for one product application, recycle it, keep the properties and use it again in a second, different application. The steel is used, not consumed, so it's available again once the product reaches the end of its life. In the packaging sector, this can be done repeatedly."

Kicking off the third session on 'The importance of transparent reporting and real recycling when setting realistic targets and measuring EU recycling rates', Alain d'Haese, Secretary General of the European Aerosol Federation FEA, called for a strong dialogue between industry and the EU institutions as the implementation phase unfolds. "There will be many details to discuss at national level".

Julius Langendor , Deputy Head of Unit in the Commission's DG Environment, presented the key steel provisions in the new legislation.

They set reuse and recycling targets for municipal and packaging waste, strict provisions on calculating recycling performance and require waste operators to record what they recover.

National authorities must submit quality checks on loss rates and there are extended producer responsibility schemes.

The Commission is involved in further technical work on calculating, verifying and reporting data on average loss rates when metals are recycled. In particular, it has to determine, by March 2019, precisely when in the process steel recycling starts.

"We don't see the whole issue. Without all the interests around the table, you will have many players playing against you" **Nils Torvalds MEP**

Langendor listed the nine review clauses, including the review of waste recycling targets the Commission must implement between 2020 and 2028. "The European Parliament has ensured we have plenty homework for the next 10 years," he said.

An equally important part of the Commission's future work, he added, is to "make sure the legislation is complied with, otherwise this is only a paper exercise".

Geert Bergsma, Manager Life Cycle analyses department, CE Delft, pointed out member states apply the current EU recycling formula in various ways. Sweden measures at the point of collection, France after sorting and Italy at final recycling. "This makes recycling rates between member states vary largely," he concluded.

The legislation will provide greater harmonisation and fairer comparison between national statistics.

At the same time, he predicted that in most countries it would lead to lower recycling rates for packaging materials than currently reported.

Hungarian MEP Tibor Szanyi spoke on the importance of raising awareness of recycling and highlighted concerns that the multiplicity of collection rules across Europe didn't help consumers.

"Our report provides detailed information for organisations and individuals wishing to know more about a real, successful material recycling story. It should help stakeholders play a meaningful role in increasing recycling and achieving a more circular economy"  
**Alexis Van Maercke, Secretary General of APEAL,**

He said, "In many towns and cities it's not easy to find out when particular waste is collected and by which collection method. If we continue to frustrate consumers like this we will not get the results we need."

EU policymakers should consider introducing legislation to replace plastic bottles with metal cans. “[Products] up to 0.5 litres should be packed in metal or glass.”

William Boyd, MD of the UK’s Metal Packaging Manufacturers Association, highlighted the effects of a leaflet campaign to encourage packaging recycling. This followed a 2010 study to determine the best way to get households to increase their recycling.

“The main conclusion was that communication directed at consumers is the key. Reassure them that the packaging that they put out for recycling really does get converted into items of real value.”

Lucien Debever, project director for the French edition of the Europe-wide Every Can Counts campaign provided an overview of their results to date.

The French campaign estimates that more than 15 million people were made aware of the can recycling project and that 57 million cans have passed through the special collection boxes over the last eight years; “This is only the tip of the iceberg,” he said. “Without our programme these 57 million cans would have been left on the ground.”

Giovanni Cappelli, General Manager of the Italian Metal Packaging Manufacturers Association (Anfima) discussed the new ‘Metal Recycles Forever’ logo, which has been widely adopted by the metal packaging industry in Italy as a definitive brand for the recyclability of metal packaging. “The logo is a first step in promoting our metals recycling message to stakeholders and policymakers.”

Closing, Alexis Van Maercke, Secretary General of APEAL, reminded participants that, “Our report provides detailed information for organisations and individuals wishing to know more about a real, successful material recycling story. It should help stakeholders play a meaningful role in increasing recycling and achieving a more circular economy.”

**Download the APEAL [Good Practices in separate collection, sorting and recycling of steel for packaging](#) [4] report.**

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