

## **Responding to Consumer Sustainability Concerns with Reusable Packaging**

Threatened by mounting trash, pollution and other environmental concerns, today's consumers are increasingly interested in sustainability, particularly in the products they buy. Reusable packaging will likely play an important role in making products environmentally friendly and attractive to customers.

The Conference Board® Global Consumer Confidence Survey confirmed consumers' concerns about environmental issues. In fact, 81 percent of global representatives said they felt strongly that companies should help improve the environment, according to [Nielsen](#).

Packaging is one of the primary sources of waste in the United States. Containers and packaging accounted for 29.7 percent of total waste in 2015, according to [U.S. PIRG](#). The waste weighed in at 77.9 million tons. Plastic packaging waste represents \$80 to \$120 billion in annual losses to the global economy, according to [World Economic Forum](#).

Because it can take upwards of 1000 years to decompose, plastic is the main concern for many. The introduction of plastic into the packaged goods space has triggered the growing adoption of single-use packaging, primarily because it reduces shipping costs. Single-use plastics also offer convenience.

Unfortunately, this convenience comes at a price.

## **Consumer Concern for Microplastics in Water Sources**

About [30 percent](#) of garbage in the U.S. is packaging. Americans generate about [4.48 pounds](#) of municipal solid waste per person per day. Much of this ends up in landfills, but a great amount of plastic and other waste is finding its way into oceans and waterways.

Over the last few years, there have been various studies regarding microplastics making their way into drinking water that have raised concern among consumers. As one of the leading laboratories in the world, Eurofins felt compelled to improve the nowadays knowledge by [mapping microplastic levels](#) in different countries. Of the 244 samples that were tested across 17 countries, 1.3% contained microplastics.

Even with these findings, public concern is still thrusting microplastics to the forefront of the health and sustainability conversation. As a result, testing [requirements and regulations](#) are requiring that producers begin using microplastic testing results to evaluate product quality and to improve packaging techniques.

## Sustainability vs. Convenience

When given the choice, consumers often opt for expediency. This is changing, though as the results of a [2015 Nielsen global study](#) found that nearly three-quarters of Millennials and more than half of Baby Boomers are willing to pay extra for sustainable offerings.

Many local and federal government organizations have enacted regulations to advance sustainability. In the U.S., federal environmental regulations and guidelines play a significant role in raising awareness of sustainability issues and promoting sustainable practices and procedures within government and in manufacturing.

Recycling efforts help reduce the amount of plastic sent to landfills, but because the recycling infrastructure is very selective of the types of waste it accepts, recycling still has limited value when it comes to sustainability. Furthermore, recycling programs place the burden onto the consumer in an era when buyers feel that companies should be playing a greater role.

A number of countries that had once imported refuse for recycling from other nations, mainly Japan, Germany, Britain, Belgium and Canada, are now turning them away. Because of its competitive prices and lax standards for waste management, China's recycling processors had handled nearly half of the world's recyclable waste for the past 25 years, until it enacted the "National Sword" policy halting shipments.

The importation of waste fell to other nations, such as Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam in 2018; many of these countries pushed back and refused the trash.

On [May 10, 2019](#), 187 parties adopted amendments to the Basel Convention, a 1989 treaty that aims to reduce the movement of plastic and hazardous waste across national borders. The amendments force nations that export waste to gain permission from the countries accepting refuse.

Since then, the cost of recycling has skyrocketed. Left without an affordable option, local municipalities are scrambling to find new markets that make recycling affordable. Many communities have reduced their recycling collections or stopped entirely.

## Companies Now Turn to Reusable Packaging

The cost of recycling combined with changes in policies caused a global shift in where and how single-use plastics are processed. It has already had far-reaching effects across manufacturers and consumer groups, causing a change in the global market.

Brands that cultivate a reputation for environmental stewardship today have an opportunity to grow market share and build loyalty. While consumers still value convenience, increasing

concerns for sustainability is driving purchases. To address this, manufacturers and retailers are switching to packaging alternatives to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills.

Because plastic packaging creates such a tremendous amount of waste, implementing a reusable packaging approach is a great way to appeal to consumers.

Several large companies like Proctor & Gamble, Nestlé, PepsiCo and Unilever, are participating in initiatives to make reusable packaging more convenient. Many are now replacing single-use plastics with glass, steel and other reusable containers that can be cleaned for reuse. These businesses are learning that they can combine sustainability with reusability to appeal to a wider consumer base and build brand loyalty.

### **Eurofins Consumer Product Testing**

At Eurofins, we are driven by our mission to contribute to global health by offering the highest quality testing, training, auditing and consulting services. To learn more about the status of microplastics testing, as well as how the results can be used to meet regulatory requirements, [contact us today](#).