

# Colgate Commits to 100% Recyclable Packaging for Three of Four Product Categories by 2020

Jennifer Elks | Apr. 17, 2014

Shareholder advocacy group As You Sow (AYS) announced today that, after dialogue with AYS, personal care products giant Colgate-Palmolive has committed to making 100 percent of its packaging for three of four product categories completely recyclable by 2020. Colgate has also committed to developing a recyclable toothpaste tube or package, which would bring its fourth product category close to the same sustainability standard (perhaps the company can take a cue from this recent student redesign of its toothpaste tube!). Most toothpaste tubes are made from unrecyclable plastic laminates.



“We congratulate Colgate-Palmolive on its leadership in phasing out unrecyclable packaging,” said Conrad MacKerron, SVP of As You Sow. “Huge amounts of embedded value and energy are being buried in landfills. These packages should be designed to be recycled, reducing the use of virgin natural resources and mitigating emissions that contribute to climate change.”

The company also agreed to increase the average recycled content of its packaging to 50 percent. Increasing the recycled content of key packaging materials such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polypropylene (PP), and paper pulp (fiber) is crucial to improving the sustainability of consumer packaging.

Unrecyclable packaging doesn’t just end up in landfills — it can get swept into waterways, which contributes to the growing problem of plastic pollution of the world’s oceans and damages marine ecosystems. There is also emerging evidence that marine plastic can absorb and spread toxins through the marine food web, and possibly to humans.

In 2012, As You Sow filed a shareholder resolution with Colgate-Palmolive requesting that it explore the feasibility of adopting an extended producer responsibility (EPR) policy for post-consumer packaging. The resolution argued that such a policy would help reduce carbon emissions and other pollution resulting from the company’s business practices. As You Sow withdrew the proposal after Colgate-Palmolive agreed to engage in dialogue, which led to the new policy statement by the company.

Colgate’s commitments include:

- By 2020 achieve 100 percent recyclable portfolio of Home, Pet, and Personal Care packaging — three out of four of its product categories;
- Develop a fully recyclable toothpaste tube or other packaging in the fourth category, Oral Care;
- Increase recycled content of packaging from 40 percent to 50 percent; and
- Reduce or eliminate use of PVC in packaging.

## Other Companies Gaining Momentum — and Not

Colgate-Palmolive is part of a growing corporate movement towards recyclable packaging. Following a dialogue with As You Sow, Keurig Green Mountain Coffee, maker of single use Keurig K-cups, recently issued a sustainability report committing to make all K-cups recyclable and achieve zero waste-to-landfill at their manufacturing and distribution facilities by 2020.

Other exciting recent developments in packaging sustainability include: Natura's stand-up pouches for its SOU personal-care products, which uses 70 percent less plastic and emits 60 percent less carbon than Natura's other packaging, is lighter and requires less space for storage and transportation, and eliminates product waste due to its shape; and HP's newstraw-based packaging, which uses up to 40 percent less energy and 90 percent less water, and emits 25 percent less CO2 during production; is lighter than wood-based molded pulp so it costs less to ship; and is stronger and more humidity resistant, offering better protection for products during transportation.

"We think you'll see more and more companies making similar commitments as environmental concerns continue to resonate with consumers," said MacKerron. "Leadership companies realize that by addressing the sustainability of their packaging now, they are positioning themselves to succeed in the markets of the future."

While these companies and others are leading the way on recyclable packaging, others are stubbornly lagging behind. 'Designed to be Waste', a new video released by As You Sow's Waste program, focuses on the companies that persist in using unrecyclable packaging for products that could easily be sold in recyclable glass or cardboard. One high-profile example is the Capri-Sun line of juices and fruit drinks, distributed in North America by Kraft Foods Group. These drinks are marketed to children and sold in composite laminate/aluminum foil pouches that cannot be recycled into new pouches. More than a billion Capri Sun pouches are estimated to be landfilled annually in the US alone. As You Sow has filed a shareholder resolution with Kraft Foods Group requesting the company assess the environmental impacts of using unrecyclable packaging.

"It is counterproductive to the development of a circular materials economy to use these unsustainable pouches when better alternatives have been around for decades," said MacKerron. "With families becoming more aware of the impact packaging waste has on the environment, companies that continue to lag behind industry leaders are at risk of consumer backlash."

In addition to the resolution at Kraft Foods, AYS' Waste program has also filed resolutions with Kroger, Safeway, Mondelez International and Dr Pepper Snapple on similar sustainability issues, including a push for producer responsibility policies that recapture recyclable packaging for reuse.

"Our research shows that \$11 billion of recyclable materials are wasted annually," added Conrad MacKerron. "These resources should be generating profits and green jobs. Instead they play a role in poisoning our environment and generate risk for the companies that produce them."

Encouraging news on this front came in a report released in February by Smithers Para, which projected that consumer demand, government legislation and technology advances will propel sustainable packaging to a \$244 billion market by 2018.