POSITION STATEMENT

REUSE

SPC's mission is to bring together sustainable packaging stakeholders to catalyze actionable improvements to packaging systems and lend an authoritative voice on issues related to packaging sustainability.

We support reusable and refillable packaging as one tool to accelerate our mission. To enable successful reusable packaging systems, the SPC believes in a holistic definition of reusable packaging that includes intentionality, system boundaries, and assured environmental benefit. Successful reusable packaging systems will also focus on applying reusable packaging to specific product categories and work towards facilitating high return rates of the packaging.

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The SPC defines **reusable packaging** as:

Packaging that allows either the business or the consumer to put the same *type* of purchased product back into the original packaging, is *designed* to be returnable and/or refillable, is *free of chemicals of concern*, and accomplishes a *minimum number of reuses* by being part of a *system that enables reuse*.

» *Type:* A category of products. For example, liquid personal care products, which can be poured back into a durable bottle when it is empty.

» *Designed to be:* Reusability must be an intentional design choice on the part of the brand, rather than a consumer choosing to repurpose single-use packaging for other uses.

» *Free of chemicals of concern:* The material used should not contain harmful chemical, physical, biological, or radiological substances that will pose a threat to human health or the environment.

» *Minimum number of reuses:* While there is no single minimum number of reuses that is appropriate across all product categories, the carbon footprint of reuse is highly dependent on this metric. Achieving some minimum number of reuses in practice is vital for meeting the environmental goals of reusable packaging.

» *System that enables reuse:* This refers to supporting elements that encourage packaging to be successfully reused, refilled, and/or returned, such as refills, dispensers, collection programs, deposits, container tracking, apps, etc.

Our definition of reusable packaging is aligned with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's four types of reuse:

» Refill at home

» Refill on the go

» Return from home

» Return on the go

The SPC finds all types of reuse to be equally important in the transition to move reusable packaging systems forward. Each type of reuse has opportunities and challenges to meet the true goal of reusable packaging - reducing the environmental footprint of the package-product system.

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The SPC encourages companies to identify when reusable packaging will be environmentally preferable to single-use *through the use of impartial and robust LCAs* and pursue innovation in those categories and formats. Additionally, this requires brands and retailers to realistically assess the likelihood that consumers will sustain their participation in reuse and refill offerings, and build out reusable offerings that reduce friction to ensure the greatest success of reusable packaging in practice. For end-of-life considerations of reusable packaging, recyclability of the packaging is an ideal attribute. However, limiting reusable packaging to those formats or materials that are currently recyclable curbside at end-of-life could lead to stifle reuse innovations or overshadow the waste hierarchy's prioritization of reuse over recyclability. Thus, striving for recyclability of a reusable or refillable package is recommended, but is not required. Rather, the focal point of reusable packaging systems should be measuring and reducing environmental impacts, increasing reuse infrastructure, and lowering consumer friction.

Critical concepts that inform the design of successful reusable packaging systems are outlined below.

1. **Reusable packaging is best suited towards specific product categories, and may not work for every product.**

   Behavior change is needed for reusable packaging to work more efficiently than single use packaging. Ultimately, reusable packaging, no matter how simple or convenient it is, will inherently require behavior change, and brands can consider ways to embrace and better design for that change. The SPC believes reusable packaging may be a better fit for product categories that meet certain criteria, such as:

   » Items that are used in foodservice (e.g. beverage cups, takeout containers)

   » Items that are bought frequently (e.g. personal/home care, supplies for work)

   » Items purchased online that are returned often (e.g. clothes, footwear)

   » Where purchasing a specific quantity of product is important

   » Where the current packaging fails to adequately protect the product

   » Where there is already a "closed loop system" of return in place (e.g. rentals)

   » Where there is a subscription model in place

   » Packaging that is often stored in the open or on display (e.g. soap dispensers)

2. **Reusable packaging needs to be returned or refilled at high rates in practice.**

   The environmental benefits of reuse may include reduction of single-use packaging waste, lower carbon footprint, energy savings, and less waste entering material streams. Reusable packaging is durable and can be an end market for recycled materials, closing the loop for materials and facilitating the circular economy. Crucial to reusable packaging's environmental benefit is a high return and refill rate in practice, not just theory. **How is the return rate calculated?** The return rate is calculated as the number of reusable packages returned after use, divided by the total reusable packages distributed. **What is high?** According to some industry experts and research, high return rates should be defined as at least 80%, if not 90%. High return rates means packaging is being reused, refilled, and/or returned multiple times. The lower the return rate, the greater the environmental impact of the reusable package.

3. **Reusable packaging is not repurposable packaging.**

   A handful of early adopters have used the term "reusable" to describe packaging that is in fact only "repurposable". Not every package made out of a thicker, more durable material can be accurately called reusable. For example, if empty yogurt packaging is used by consumers to store paper clips, this makes it repurposable, but it does not mean it is reusable. Based on the SPC's definition, reusable packaging requires that there be a system in place to facilitate the reuse of packaging for the same purpose.

In order for the packaging industry to contribute to a stronger marketplace of reusable and refillable packaging, the SPC encourages its Members to design for the various elements of successful reusable packaging outlined above. With these principles in place, reusable packaging will be well-equipped to create positive environmental change.