SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING
COALITION®

DESIGNING FOR END OF LIFE BY PRODUCT CATEGORY

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.

Most companies in the packaging value chain - including raw material manufacturers, converters, brands, and retailers - have goals to improve the environmental profile of their packaging. Whether through the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Global Commitment framework or internal goal-setting efforts, companies have committed to reducing the impacts of packaging materials. This includes efforts to address impacts from early in the packaging life cycle (through strategies like elimination, the use of recycled content, and virgin plastic reduction) as well as later in the packaging life cycle (through design for reusability, recyclability, and/or compostability). Some companies have also set goals to reduce packaging, usually through material lightweighting or fewer components in a packaging system, and less frequently, through innovation or direct elimination.

Despite years of effort and some notable progress, **many companies are not on track to meet their 2025 goals**. Indeed, most companies are now attempting to understand and communicate their successes and failures, and to set new goals. In part, this is because packaging goals have many challenges and compete for focus in organizations. Mature supply chains, disruptions from the pandemic and balancing the cost of change with quarterly profitability goals all factor into the likelihood that goals will be met.

Progress Towards 100% Reusable, Recyclable, or Compostable Goals To Date

2019	
2020	
2021	
2022	

Adapted from 2023 EMF Global Commitment Progress Report

100% by 2025

Looking for a "one size fits all" solution - for example, 100% recyclability for all packaging - is not realistic, nor will this approach move at the speed needed for the scale of the waste and climate problems. Rather, applying the right solution to the appropriate packaging challenge will be the best use of stakeholders' resources.

Before setting aside 2025 goals and adopting 2030 goals, the Sustainable Packaging Coalition recommends that companies look at goals - specifically goals for packaging at end-of-life - in the context of product portfolios and categories. **The SPC recommends a product category specific strategy as a framework to organize company goals supported by the appropriate science and data.** The SPC believes that taking a "category-specific approach" can help companies focus their sustainability efforts on the right end-of-life pathway, and to avoid designing packaging for an inappropriate disposal scenario.

Specifically, it is important to acknowledge that certain product categories are **inherently a poor fit for recyclability or compostability**. For example, these product categories may have too much, or too little, food residue, making them unattractive to recyclers or composters, and uniquely suited for only one end-of-life approach. Packaging for certain categories may be extremely difficult to collect, sort, or reprocess as a recyclable or compostable material. Understanding these challenges before selecting an end-of-life approach, and instead designing for a different scenario, will greatly help companies reduce the time, cost, and effort it takes to reach their goals.

Companies should also have a plan for how they expect to meet their reusability goal. By identifying which product categories are a good fit for reusability, companies can commit to working with their peers on shared reverse logistics, standardization, and other strategies to create programs with high return or refill rates in practice.

Keep reading for product category-specific guidance for the most common goal companies across the packaging value chain have set, designing 100% of their packaging to be reusable, recyclable, or compostable.

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PRODUCT CATEGORY	SUB CATEGORY	SHOULD IT BE DESIGNED TO BE...?		
		REUSABLE	RECYCLABLE	COMPOSTABLE
Durable goods	Apparel and Apparel Accessories	Not a good fit	Design and label for recyclability	Not a good fit
	Durable CPG products (EX: Auto Care, Home Goods, Lawn and Garden, Movies, games, books, Sports and outdoors, Storage, Tools and hardware, Toys, Furniture, Electronics)	Not a good fit	Design and label for recyclability	Not a good fit
Non-food products that get used up	Home, Family, Body Products (EX: Baby Care, Personal Care and Beauty, Home Care, Pet Care)	A good fit because products are purchased or used frequently by consumers	If not, design and label for recyclability	Not a good fit
Food & beverage	Beverages	A good fit because products are purchased or used frequently by consumers	If not, design and label for recyclability	Not a good fit
	Flexible Packaging for Food	May be a good fit if products are purchased or used frequently by consumers	If compatible with mechanical recycling systems, a good fit for design and label for recyclability / If not, explore responsible advanced recycling technologies for contexts where the application prevents mechanical recyclability	A good fit when there are high amounts of food residue
	Rigid Packaging for Food	May be a good fit if products are purchased or used frequently by consumers	A good fit when there are **low** amounts of food residue	A good fit when there are **high** amounts of food residue
	Fresh and Frozen Food	May be a good fit if products are purchased or used frequently by consumers	A good fit when there are **low** amounts of food residue	A good fit due to **high** amounts of food residue
	Food Service	A good fit because products are purchased or used frequently by consumers	May be a good fit when there are low amounts of food of residue (e.g. drink cups)	A good fit due to high amounts of food residue
Healthcare	Prescriptions, medical devices, or other healthcare products	A good fit for reuse/refill if products are delivered frequently to a consumers' home and/or is part of a subscription model	If compatible with mechanical recycling systems, a good fit for design and label for recyclability / If not, explore responsible advanced recycling technologies for contexts where the application prevents mechanical recyclability	Not a good fit
Secondary packaging		A good fit for reuse/refill	Design and label for recyclability	Not a good fit unless there are high amounts of food residue
HOW? Refer to these Resources:		Guidance for Reusable Packaging	How2Recycle Guide to Recyclability	Understanding the Role of Compostable Packaging

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Projects of GreenBlue

SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING COALITION® How2Recycle How2Compost recycled material STANDARD

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