

ENVIRONMENTAL BRIEFS

A Quarterly Review of News About Vinyl and the Environment

Customers Still Prefer Vinyl. Despite the environmental pressure vinyl has been under, packaging customers remain positive about the advantages of using vinyl film and sheet. "Packagers still want to use vinyls, because in many applications no other material approaches the same cost/function advantage," writes *Food & Drug Packaging* Technical Editor Robert J. Kelsey in the November 1991 issue.

Vinyl's Image Is Improving. Packaging Editor Greg Erikson has arrived at a similar conclusion. After two decades at the top of everybody's hit list, he writes in December, vinyl's image is improving as industry efforts to educate environmentally aware packagers are coupled with its hard-to-beat cost advantages in many product applications. "Emphasis on container clarity for many types of products has benefited vinyl. The trend toward unit-dose packaging for pharmaceuticals looks good for vinyl sheet. And the market for flexible vinyl film appears stable," says Erikson.

Comparing Apples to Apples. In a surprising finding, the most recent Council for Solid Waste Solutions' study of post-consumer plastics recycling shows that vinyl bottles are being recycled at a higher rate than custom PET bottles. (*Recycling Times*, December 3, 1991) As Bill Carroll, OxyChem's director of commercial development, points out in the company's *EcoVinyl Echoes* newsletter (4th Quarter, 1991), "This data really compares equals to equals, products to products, without the confusion of deposit redemption and recycling of PET soft drink bottles." In reporting the study's findings, the Council said that it anticipates a significant increase in the recovery of post-consumer vinyl as more cost-effective methods for sorting mixed plastics bottles and additional end-uses for recycled material become available.

Banning Materials Still a Bad Idea. If the plastics industry really wants to promote recycling, claims a plastics recycler in *Plastics News* (November 4, 1991), one of the first things it should do is stop defending PVC bottles. Banning vinyl won't solve the problem, responded BFGoodrich senior business manager D'Lane Wisner in the November 25, 1991 issue of the same publication. "Purifying a feedstock stream has appeal to plastics recyclers. But pure streams don't exist in the messy world of post-consumer recycling and never will. And if we're willing to ban one material to make recycling easier, why stop there?" Wisner asks rhetorically. "Why not require that everything be packaged in one material, say, aluminum? The idea is, of course, absurd. So is a ban on vinyl."

Organic Cleaner Packaged in Recycled Vinyl. A good example of why product bans are a bad idea comes from Schoeneck Containers Inc. (New Berlin, WI). That company is making containers composed of 50 percent recycled vinyl, which are subsequently used to package Watkins degreaser and organic cleaner. Vinyl's chemical resistance makes it ideal for applications like this, and the Schoeneck containers, containing both post-consumer vinyl and industrial scrap, are reported to be indistinguishable in quality or appearance from the bottles previously used. (*Waste Recovery Report*, October 1991)

180-Degree Turnaround. Several years ago, members of Bellona, a radical Norwegian environmental group, broke into vinyl manufacturing sites operated by Norsk Hydro and stole samples of the plants' products. Today, Bellona has a different view. The group is supporting the decision of Norsk Hydro to build a new vinyl manufacturing unit at Rafnes in Norway. Bellona's new attitude toward vinyl is the result of a comprehensive study the group conducted for itself last year. Bellona concluded that "a generally reduced use of vinyl plastics will, given today's circumstances, lead to a worsening of the environmental situation." (*PRW News*, October 1991)

Vinyl Recycling Technology Scores 100%. In a series of tests to separate post-consumer plastic containers, the "VinylCycle" automated sortation system developed by Nashville-based National Recovery Technologies, Inc. (NRT), has demonstrated its ability to achieve the level of product purity demanded by users of recycled plastic. The VinylCycle produced a PET stream with purity in excess of 99.99 percent in the first pass and 100 percent purity on the second pass. The testing was conducted using a "PET-rich" stream of mixed vinyl and PET containers in a proportion that mirrors real-world collection conditions for plastics. The tests were conducted by the Vinyl Institute in cooperation with NRT and Steiner-Liff Iron & Metal Company. (Source: *The Vinyl Institute/National Recovery Technologies, Inc.*)

Commercial Capacity System for Mixed Bales Includes Vinyl. Still other plastics-separation equipment is making its debut. In Chicago, Eaglebrook Plastics Inc. has installed the first commercial-capacity automated system for sorting post-consumer plastic bottles including clear PVC, natural and mixed color HDPE, clear and green PET, and polypropylene. The system, developed by Magnetic

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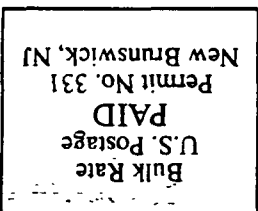
The Vinyl Institute is a national trade association representing the leading U.S. manufacturers of vinyl, vinyl feedstocks and additives, and vinyl film and sheet products. The Vinyl Institute is a division of SPI, The Society of the Plastics Industry, Inc.

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Separation Systems (MSS) of Nashville, breaks down bales of commingled plastic bottles and separates them for grinding "...using several optical sensors connected to a microprocessor," according to MSS President Garry Kenny. (*Plastics & Environment*, September 20, 1991)

An Alternative to Curbside Recycling. Curbside recycling is widely regarded as the best way to make municipal recycling a reality, but some waste handlers take a different approach. Mid-American Waste Systems' Redlin Transfer Recycling Station in suburban Cleveland does all the separating and recycling at its state-of-the-art recovery facility rather than asking residents to sort at the curb. According to Mark Finney, Redlin's recycling coordinator, this allows materials not usually included in curbside programs such as corrugated paper, ferrous metals and vinyl plastics to be recycled. "While there are obvious exceptions, industry figures show that only about 50 to 60 percent of the homes in the area will participate in voluntary curbside programs," Finney says. "With a MRF you definitely get 100 percent participation." (*American City & County*, November 1991)

Recycling Crunch Hits U.S. A darker picture, however, is painted by the *Wall Street Journal* (January 17, 1992). According to the *Journal*, the recycling movement is in peril, a victim of ignorance of basic economics. "The supply side of America's recycling revolution has been growing at an explosive rate," reports the publication, "but the demand side is still barely under way. Manufacturers simply aren't geared up to absorb the huge volumes suddenly available." And the big problem isn't plastics. Huge gluts of newspapers and glass have piled up in collection centers, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. Industry is racing to develop new markets and bring new plants on line to absorb the materials, but some fear that the country's entire recycling structure could collapse if these efforts don't take hold soon.



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