



Packaging counts too: practical circular economy in household cleaning

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The 16th Akteurs-Workshop at the consumer-oriented Forum Waschen in Berlin was devoted to the circular economy in household cleaning. The discussions focused not only on cleaning products and laundry detergents, but also on their packaging. On the first day of the event Immo Sander, Head of Packaging Development at Werner & Mertz, presented the projects run by the Recyclate Initiative. Among the Forum attendees were representatives from public authorities, government ministries, research institutions, labor unions, manufacturers of detergents and cleaners, household appliance manufacturers, churches, environmental organizations, universities and consumer associations.

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Opportunities and challenges in plastic recycling

In his lecture Sander spoke about opportunities and challenges encountered in plastic recycling. He pointed to the development accomplishments of the Recyclate Initiative at Werner & Mertz to show how material recycling loops can be kept closed and how high-quality and healthy secondary raw materials from plastic packaging can be used.



Instead of conventional linear raw material use (Cradle-to-Grave), the Initiative pursues circular raw material use in keeping with the Cradle-to-Cradle® principle. The latter not only conserves valuable resources but also protects the environment. Recyclables for the packaging and cleaning solutions from Werner & Mertz are directed into closed cycles.

Sander explained how in recent years the Initiative, thanks to the constructive cooperation along the entire supply chain, has utilized previously untapped secondary raw materials sources like the Yellow Bag for material recycling. "Together with our partners we proved that it is possible to develop bottles and caps of 100 percent recycled PET, HDPE and PP," he said. Pioneering achievements range from the development of Frosch bottles of 100 percent recycled PET to the world's first rHDPE packaging and rPP caps, both made of 100 percent post-consumer plastic from the Yellow Bag.

Design for Recycling

A functioning material recycling loop, however, requires improvements in the quality of the packaging that ends up in the Yellow Bag, Sander said. "The recyclability of packaging has to be taken into consideration in the packaging design." Materials referred to as "healthy", i.e., plastics sorted according to origin, and environmentally compatible ingredients, are absolute prerequisites for a functioning circular economy. Furthermore, developers have to ensure that packaging can be recycled into high-quality packaging after its usage phase.

This "design for recycling" includes the use of recycled plastic that can be sorted according to origin, sustainable masterbatches and printing ink, and removable labels. "When packaging is designed for recycling, it is easier to separate the types of plastic by origin and then it is possible to offer the right material to the recycling industry," Sander said.

The packaging expert presented the company's latest joint development with the internationally active packaging company Mondi as an example. The fully recyclable standing pouch of a mono-material (polyethylene) with removable label was designed according to the Cradle-to-Cradle® principle. "With this groundbreaking design for recycling, we have taken a giant step for closed-loop circulation of plastic packaging," said Sander. After use, the patented innovative standing pouch can be recycled completely into recyclates of nearly the same quality as the source material. Starting this year, the pouch will be used as flexible packaging for Frosch products.

Related Workshop

In the follow-up workshop, which was directed by Arno Melchior, Global Packaging Director for Reckitt Benckiser Group, Sander answered questions on current topics related to sustainable packaging development.

In response to the question "How does the 'end' of the cycle become the 'beginning'?", the workshop visitors avidly discussed improved consumer communication and information, the demands for standard and feasible European regulations, and the potential of sleeve solutions and bag-in-box systems.



Those in attendance agreed that a uniform political and economic framework is the prerequisite for rapid entry into the circular economy. The results of the Forum are to include a paper with "Golden Rules" for the proper way to deal with packaging.

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