



Consumers deceived with recycled packaging!

04-May-2021 - Mainz

The reality is that used plastic from the Yellow Bag is hardly used

Yet another scandal involving plastic recycling has been disclosed this week by the Süddeutsche Zeitung. Instead of using more used plastic from the Yellow Bag, companies are importing cheap "recyclate" from Asia, without being able to check whether the material is actually recycled. "Much of it could be falsified," Antonello Ciotti, Director of Equipolymers, one of the largest PET manufacturers in the EU, told the SZ. He summed it up: "While shopping, consumers can become victims of greenwashing." Reinhard Schneider, owner of the Mainz-based cleaning products manufacturer Werner & Mertz, reaffirmed his view in the article: "The danger of the consumer being misled is very high. It is similar to money laundering in that the origin of the PET is not transparent. Its source can be disguised very easily."

Falsely declared recyclate leads to absurdity in recycling rates

False declarations pose a big problem for consumers doing their daily shopping. For manufacturers of recycled PET in Europe, the cheap goods from Asia are problematic as the resulting price wars endanger all the efforts undertaken to promote and increase the recycling rates in Europe. "Illegal re-declaration is simple and inexpensive, but high-quality recycling is a challenge and sometimes costly," said Thomas Fischer of Environmental Action Germany (DUH) in the article.

Advanced mechanical recycling of material from the Yellow Bag is feasible

Since 2012 Werner & Mertz has been working with its cooperation partners along the entire value chain within the Recyclate Initiative to pursue and promote high-quality mechanical recycling from the Yellow Bag. The Initiative has repeatedly proven that it is technologically feasible to produce packaging of equal quality from Post-Consumer Recyclate (PCR). Since 2014 the PET bottles for the well-known Frosch brand have been made of 100% PCR, 20% of which comes from the Yellow Bag. The remaining 80% is from the European deposit bottle collection system (Bottle to Bottle). To date more than 450 million bottles of this type have been put on the market. Most recently Werner & Mertz reported still another recycling success. Together with its cooperation partner ALPLA, the company has increased the share of recyclate from the Yellow Bag to 50%!

Besides Werner & Mertz, hardly any other company is prepared to pay the price for recyclate from the Yellow Bag, which is higher than the cost of virgin plastic. Greenwashing is often practiced instead, according to the SZ article.

Chemical recycling is yet another point of conflict



Besides the origin of the supposed recyclate, another problem is the type of recycling process, according to SZ editor Michael Kläsgen. A growing number of companies, including BASF, are using chemical recycling, which Werner & Mertz owner Schneider said in the article, "is a sub-type of incineration that uses a great deal of energy and in the end shows a negative ecological balance." Several European environmental associations therefore have warned in a joint study against classifying this process as environmentally benign.

Demands for financial incentives and laws without gaps

Consequently, the manufacturer Werner & Mertz sees that many set screws urgently need re-adjustment.

For one, Werner & Mertz demands that lawmakers establish financial incentives for the use of PCR in order to effectively counteract the trashing of our planet and get to a climate-friendly circular economy for plastic. Werner & Mertz also works toward the creation of a fund into which every business that brings packaging to the market would pay a defined contribution and only those who use PCR from Europe would receive a repayment.

For another, the company says there is a need for tightly written laws which clearly define what counts as recyclate and what does not. Werner & Mertz wants the amendment to the circular economy law to state unambiguously that only mechanically processed used plastic from post-consumer household waste collections is recyclate.



The RAL Quality Mark provides the proportion of recyclate from the Yellow Bag in the entire packaging, including label and cap. The figure in percentage is made up of the weight of those components. For the packaging of emsal Parkett, for example, the bottle is made of 100% recyclate from the Yellow Bag and the cap and label of 0% recyclate each for a total share of recyclate equal to 84%. Copyright Werner & Mertz

Consumers have few chances to check validity

Unfortunately, there are very few independent seals on which consumers can rely. In the SZ article Schneider recommended the RAL Quality Mark, which provides information about how much recyclate actually comes from the Yellow Bag. For that purpose, all processing levels, from sorting and preparation to the use of recyclate in products are documented and all production sites are inspected.

Consumers can check the packaging by taking a close look at the neck of the bottle. A slight gray coloring indicates that recyclate was used in its production. However, that is not a truly satisfactory option, according to the article in the Süddeutschen Zeitung.

Link to article (German only) in the Süddeutschen Zeitung: [sueddeutsche.de](https://www.sueddeutsche.de)

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