

Green Packaging

A tremendous increase in packaging wastes not only contributes to pollution but also causes ecological imbalance by draining natural resources. In fact, packaging waste accounts for a significant quantity of solid wastes, particularly in urban areas. In different countries, packaging wastes generate an estimated 1 to 8 per cent of the garbage, says *iimm.org*. To help maintain ecological balance, many countries have adopted the 'green packaging' practice.

What is Green Packaging?

Packaging that causes less damage to the environment is termed 'green packaging'. The manufacture and the use of green packaging material puts less pressure on the natural resources. It involves cleaner production processes and the use of biodegradable, recycled or recyclable materials. Some green packagings can be reused without any harm to the content.

The disposed biodegradable green packagings easily decompose and disappear into the soil or the atmosphere, without damage to the environment. Paper bag, bamboo basket, etc. are some commonly used biodegradable green packagings.

Recyclable packaging materials like glass, metal, paper, cardboard, plastic, etc., can be processed further. Reusable packaging, like glass bottles, can itself be cleaned and reused.

Why Green Packaging?

The increasing importance of packaging in marketing and distribution of products can't be undermined. This has resulted in enhanced consumption of packaging materials as well as increased packaging waste. The consumption of packaging materials causes depletion of natural resources, higher energy consumption, disposal problems and pollution of land, air and water. So, the need for 'green packaging'.

Green Packaging in India

The use of eco-friendly packaging materials is gaining momentum in India. Increased use of recyclable packaging material like paper, cardboard, tin, plastics, etc. can be seen in food and consumer goods packaging. The use of cardboard boxes and PVC crates instead of wooden ones for packaging horticultural products is being promoted by the government. Recently the Jammu & Kashmir Government decided to subsidise the cost of cardboard boxes used by fruit growers in the State, reports *The Indian Express*.

The Eco-mark scheme for packaging materials, introduced by the Central

Ministry of Environment and Forests, is a milestone. The Ministry, in 1995, notified the Eco-mark criteria for packaging materials like paper boards, plastics and laminates in the Gazette of India. The incorporation of the Eco-mark requirements in 27 BIS standards is under process, which includes waterproof paper, folding box board, bitumen impregnated paper, grease proof paper, aluminium foil laminates, cartons for non-soapy detergents, composite containers for dry products and corrugated fibre board boxes for packing and transport.

The International Move

Green packaging and the reduction of packaging wastes is attaining worldwide attention. Many developed countries have adopted ecolabelling for packaging materials. In 1991, Germany issued an ordinance on 'Avoidance of packaging waste'. *The Packaging Council of Australia*, along with other organisations, has developed an environmental code of practice for packaging. The code provides companies with guidelines to help evaluate the environmental impact of new packaging materials and products.

What Needs to be Done

The success of 'green packaging' and reduction of packaging wastes needs a concerted effort of the manufacturing sector, the government and consumers. The following steps can boost the efforts:

- * Avoiding over packaging by the manufacturers;
- * Reducing the weight of packaging materials without compromising on the product's protection and consumer safety;
- * Development of more easily recyclable materials;
- * Development of new recycling technologies;
- * Designing returnable packaging systems for both consumer and industrial goods;
- * Use of packaging materials that can be easily incinerated without generating hazardous matters;
- * Use of packages that are easy to recollect or sort;
- * Ecolabelling of packaging plastics for easy recovery and recycling;
- * Consumers should prefer to buy those products in which biodegradable, recycled or recyclable packaging materials have been used.

Sources: *iimm.org*, *bbc.co.uk*, *pca.org.au*, *cpcb.nic.in*

