

# MANUFACTURERS MUST LEAD BY EXAMPLE TO INCREASE SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

TEK PAK

**M**anufacturers are known for innovation, and as the world embraces sustainability, our industry must evolve too. Governments and consumers worldwide are demanding greater environmental responsibility. While regulations vary, the need for action is universal. At Tek Pak we've embarked on a sustainability journey. We're setting ambitious goals, aiming to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2033. Just as we routinely think outside of the box to find solutions for our customers, we must think outside of the box to help us reach these challenging, but achievable, goals.

Collectively, our industry will be best served by taking a holistic approach that not only includes making investments in day-to-day operations but also exploring alternative solutions to meet customer demands for greater sustainability in the supply chain. With so much at stake, where do manufacturers begin?

## Setting a Goal | Defining the Mission

In any corporate endeavor, it's crucial for leadership to establish a clear mission and incorporate accountability measures to ensure project success. Equally important is leadership's belief in the goals they are striving to achieve. In the years to come, preserving our environment as we know it will become increasingly difficult without making changes in our lifestyles to reduce our footprint on this earth. At Tek Pak, we have set a bold agenda, and have defined our mission to reduce our carbon footprint. To reach net zero-carbon emissions by 2033, we must embrace a mix of strategies, including product and materials recycling, building sustainable vendor partnerships, and developing new sustainable product solutions for customers. This is a large undertaking, but our confidence in achieving these goals stems from our commitment to holding ourselves accountable. Work towards our carbon neutrality goal was initiated by the formation of an internal

Sustainability Committee at the beginning of 2023. The committee convenes weekly to drive Tek Pak's sustainability agenda forward, ensuring that we remain on track. Additionally, we are actively working towards ISO 14000 registration, with the aim of achieving this milestone by Q3 of 2024.

## Leading by Example | Proactive Changes in Internal Operations

As many manufacturers often involve high-energy usage and materials that contribute to environmental challenges, how can we reduce our carbon footprint? The answer lies in our ability to innovate.

Programs and resources are available for manufacturers seeking to make strides in sustainability efforts. Earlier this year, we proactively sought an audit of two of our facilities under the Department of Energy's (DOE) Industrial Assessment Center (IAC) program by the University of Illinois Chicago. The final DOE reports have been issued and recommendations outlined; the improvement recommendations were then submitted to DOE's Workstream 1 Implementation Grant Program for 50% cost share reimbursement.

Tek Pak also became a member of the International Molded Fiber Association in 2023 and is currently developing new sustainable uses for microfiber/molded fiber packaging; our R & D department is working with pulp formulations to find sustainable solutions for customers. Additionally, we operate in the thermoforming industry, specializing in the development of products and packaging for electronics, healthcare, food, and industrial sectors—most using materials made from plastics. While we're advancing alternative packaging solutions derived from our molded fiber division, we recognize the importance of starting with our existing processes to ensure we're being responsible with what we do every day—that includes internal operations and practices on our shop room floors, as well as the relationships we

have our suppliers. Operationally, there are several steps companies can take today to make meaningful strides in reducing their carbon footprint, just as we have done at Tek Pak:

- **Energy Efficiency: Implementation of the Indoor Air Quality Control (IAC) improvements** starting with replacement of existing lighting with an LED equivalent. We will also be installing Variable Frequency Drives (VFDs) for chiller pump motors and fixing any remaining compressed air leaks. Installing photovoltaic systems is envisioned and in the planning stages.

- **Installation of Reverse-Osmosis Drinking Water Stations:** Installation of reverse-osmosis drinking water stations in facilities and providing reusable water bottles to all our employees to reduce the use of bottled water.

- **Development and Expansion of Internal Recycling Programs:** Our internal committee now publishes a monthly e-newsletter to keep Tek Pak employees and stakeholders informed about our sustainability activities. We provide educational materials to engage everyone in our journey toward building a circular economy.

- **Proper Handling of Materials on Shop Floors:** In production areas, ensure that recyclable materials are placed in designated recycling bins, and non-recyclables are disposed of correctly. Contaminants placed in recycling bins and dumpsters pose not only sorting challenges but can also damage recycling processing equipment. Unlike curbside collection at homes, businesses can face contamination fees for improper disposal.

- **Recycling Industrial Plastic Scrap:** Tek Pak has a longstanding commit-

ment to recycling industrial plastic scrap that can be replicated across the industry. Trim and setup scrap generated during the production of our carrier tape product is sent to a local plastic recycler for re-pelletizing. We then re-extrude the recycled plastic into new packaging, contributing to the closure of the industrial plastic recycling loop. Any plastic trim waste that we cannot reuse for our own products gets sent to local recycling centers where it is reprocessed and sold on the recycled plastic market.

- Repurposing Unused Equipment and Materials: Machines, parts, screws, bolts; all can be harvested from other equipment that is no longer in use. That tradition has remained at Tak Pak since our inception more than thirty years ago. Any equipment, even office furniture, can be stored and repurposed to fill current needs.

- Fun and Competitive Incentives: In the spirit of employee engagement, we're launching a competition among three of our manufacturing locations. The goal is to determine which location can achieve the most significant reduction in recycling and waste disposal costs compared to historical baseline data. Employees at the winning location will receive an incentive, which is yet to be determined.

### Sourcing and Supply Chain Evaluation

In addition to making changes to operations, manufacturers should also look to innovate throughout their supply chains, including sourcing more sustainable office and factory supplies. For instance, consider the shift to biodegradable gloves that naturally decompose in a landfill within just 2.5 years, a significantly faster rate than untreated gloves.

Just as we carefully select our supplies, many of us play a vital role in the supply chain for others and have a responsibility to produce products and parts that can also become part of the circular economy. In line with this commitment, Tek Pak joined the Association of Plastic Recyclers (APR) in 2023. This affiliation equips us with the necessary tools to enhance our effectiveness in advancing the circular plastics economy. Additionally, APR offers resources to assist manufacturers in designing products that are more easily recyclable. Our

journey towards ISO 14000 registration is slated to commence in 2024.

As manufacturers in energy-intensive industries, reducing our carbon footprint is a challenge. But innovation is our strength. Every company has a responsibility to do its share to help contribute to environmental sustainability. The future cannot be too hot to handle. As an industry, action must be taken now that is intentional, committed, and beyond all other measurements: effective. ♦

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