

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF A PLASTICS MANUFACTURER

TEK PAK, INC



As discussions continue surrounding climate changes and ways we can collectively protect the environment, the question may arise: why should a plastics manufacturer care about sustainability? While the connection between plastics manufacturing and environmental stewardship may not be immediately apparent, the reality is that our industry has a profound impact on the planet, making it imperative for manufacturers to prioritize sustainability efforts.

The thermoforming industry, responsible for everything ranging from food packaging, small electronics shields, and even medical trays, has been critically examining its environmental impact. Manufacturers in this space must recognize our responsibility to minimize our environmental footprint and make efforts to embark on a comprehensive sustainability journey. This commitment needs to extend beyond general compliance with regulations; it's about doing what's right for the planet and future generations—and our responsibility to the community in which we operate. To this end, Tek Pak has set ambitious goals, aiming to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2033. This bold objective serves as a guiding principle for all our sustainability initiatives, and this is something every manufacturer can employ as we continue to look to the future of industry operations.

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. As a plastics manufacturer operating in the thermoforming industry, we must recognize the significance of adopting responsible practices in our daily opera-

tions. Taking a multifaceted approach that encompasses various strategies, actions can include optimizing production processes to minimize waste, maximizing energy efficiency, and transitioning to renewable energy sources wherever feasible. Additionally, specific to the sector, actively investing in research and development to develop innovative, eco-friendly packaging solutions that reduce reliance on traditional plastics and promote circularity is something we all need to consider as regulations continue to increase in this space.

Manufacturers in the plastics sector must remain committed to minimizing our environmental impact through innovation and responsible stewardship. This includes implementing rigorous recycling programs within our facilities, ensuring proper disposal of waste materials, and promoting sustainable sourcing practices throughout our supply chains. One of the cornerstones of our sustainability efforts is our proactive approach to recycling industrial plastic scrap. At Tek Pak, we recently began collecting and recycling flexible plastics; this includes bags, bubble wrap, and shrink wrap, materials that are not processed in normal recycling facilities. This low-density polyethylene (LDPE) will become feedstock for composite decking and will eliminate even more plastic waste going to landfills. By repurposing trim and setup scrap generated during the production process, we're able to close the loop on plastic waste and reduce the need for virgin materials.

Legislation was introduced in Illinois this year (HB 1616) that would extend authorization windows for the construction of new advanced recycling facilities, adjust-

ing time frames originally set out in 2019 legislation but were disrupted by COVID-19 pandemic-related delays. Traditional recycling technology excludes many materials and products, pushing them into the trash stream (and ultimately into landfills). Legislators understood the promise of advanced recycling technology in 2019 when the original bill passed with bipartisan support. The General Assembly must take action to extend the authorization windows and clear the way for advanced recycling in Illinois; our collective waste disposal methods are in need of modernization.

Beyond internal operations, and legislative action, actively engaging with our suppliers and partners to promote sustainability throughout the entire value chain is critical. Through strategic collaborations with organizations like the Illinois Manufacturers' Association and the Association of Plastic Recyclers, we can collectively advance the circular plastics economy and drive positive change across the industry. By prioritizing sustainable sourcing practices and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility, we're paving the way for a more sustainable future for the plastics manufacturing sector.

As a plastics manufacturer, we care deeply about sustainability and our global manufacturing ecosystem because we understand the profound impact our industry has on the planet. By prioritizing sustainability in all aspects of our operations and supply chain, we're not only reducing our environmental footprint, but we're also driving meaningful change towards a more sustainable future for generations to come. ♦