

# TAKING PACKAGING GREEN

## RETHINKING MATERIAL CHOICES FOR PRODUCT FORMULATIONS

ACCORDING TO SPAFINDER'S 2009 Top Ten Trend List, "Green initiatives and eco processes are quietly and meaningfully [becoming] enmeshed throughout the entire spa so there are no demands required of the spa guest, who is, after all, there to relax." That means spas are embedding green techniques deeply into their workings to show a quiet confidence that the spa is supporting sustainability and recycling. The goal is to reduce green fatigue in clients

and employees by decreasing constant claims and to-dos while maintaining green practices. So goodbye showy, loud and superficial green gestures, says SpaFinder, as well as those that tax or confuse the spa goer. Say hello to more quietly green but effective policies.

One imbedded policy trend emerging right now is reflected when a spa asks a skin care line, "Is your packaging recyclable?" The question is often asked of packaging companies by skin

care lines that are getting the questions from their clients or potential clients. For that reason, many packaging manufacturers are making greener packaging to accommodate the growing request. "The trend is new. Greening has been a goal for awhile in developing formulations, but green packaging has been slower in its development than it should be," says Jennifer Mason McLaughlin, Marfred Industries, Lake View Terrace, CA. ➔

BY SAM DHATT





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"All that said, the skin care industry is ahead of most industries in green packaging, as it is more consumer driven than many," says McLaughlin. "Other industries are not focusing on it as much yet." The shipping packaging of these packaging manufacturers has been totally green for some time, an example being brown boxes. Even the peanuts used for shipping are 100 percent starch and readily available, fully biodegradable and no more expensive than the former materials. Due to demands by their clients, the companies manufacturing shipping materials do not consider the former peanuts an option.

### Costs to be green

In the U.S., packaging made of recyclable, sustainable or a combination of these materials is 20 to 30 percent more expensive than traditional materials. The reason is that there is not enough demand to drive down the price. "In England, green packaging is just as inexpensive as traditional packaging because there is a high demand for it, bringing down the prices," says McLaughlin. In the U.S., consumer demand for recycled materials in packaging is still low so mostly only the larger companies can afford to purchase that packaging. The smaller lines cannot afford them, though some use them regardless of the costs and are forced to raise their prices to accommodate the expenditure. "Eventually the green consumers will demand the change by asking, Is your packaging recyclable?, so demand will go up and the prices will decrease," says McLaughlin. "Then all of the skin care lines will go to it," she says.

### Recycled vs. sustainable

Many people think that the phrases "made from recycled material" and "made from sustainable materials" have the same meaning—but there are important variations. An understanding of the differences is vital in choosing products if the spa wants its choices to be greener. The differences are explained below.

Recycled materials mean the product is manufactured—at least to some extent—from recycled materials, or those recovered from previously used materials. They may be made of a percentage of recycled materials, usually 20 to 30 percent, and still say "made from recycled materials."

clad materials.” The percentage may be stated somewhere on the packaging. The remaining percentage is made up of virgin or sustainable materials. Retail bags are usually made with a percentage of recycled materials while boxes that hold consumer product containers usually are not made of recycled materials, as the print does not stand out as well on those materials. For that reason, they tend to be virgin and/or sustainable materials rather than recycled.

Sustainable materials are all made from new raw materials that are routinely replaced in nature. An example would be packaging board (the materials of the outer shipping boxes) that comes from trees grown from a sustainable resource that replants trees to replace the trees cut for materials. These new materials are from trees that were replanted and harvested.

Recyclable materials are those that can be saved for future reuse. Recycling is an action activity, meaning the person or business must set up a system for actively separating nonrecyclable materials from those that are saved for reuse. Then the recyclable materials are sent for processing and afterwards for reuse in manufacturing. It takes commitment to recycle and is considered admirable, even by those who do not do so themselves.

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## Packaging types

Many types of packaging must be considered in discussing recyclable or sustainable packaging with your manufacturer.

- **Shipping boxes** – the outer boxes that hold the products as they are delivered to the spa.
- **Product boxes** – the boxes that hold the product bottles or tubes and have designs printed on them for aesthetic purposes.
- **Product containers** – such as tubes, jars, air pumps, etc., which hold the formulations that are actually applied on the consumer.

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Virgin materials are from new and unused raw materials, and the material resources are not replanted. If reused in future manufacturing, they become recycled materials and prevent the destruction of their resources in just that amount. The contrasting category is sustainable materials, which are new and unused but have been replaced in nature by replanting, thus not destroying their resource for future reuse.

### Bottles and jars

“I get calls constantly from companies who want to be green and ask how to do it,” says Gary Sparks, West Coast Sales, PKG Group, Chatsworth, CA. “The reality is that all components within [container] packaging in the cosmetics industry, such as airless pumps, are recyclable but most must be separated or broken apart for recycling. Some consumers are committed, others are not because they are too busy or too lazy and do not do it.” In the end, a manufacturer can develop and fully use recyclable containers, but

if the end user consumer is not committed to the required activity for recycling, it is all for naught. The containers will go to the landfill.

### Recycling realities

Recycling is the act of separating reuseable trash from that which is not and sending it to be processed for reuse in manufacturing. It takes different forms in communities, from being picked up at the curb to requiring a drop off at a central point by the persons making the effort to deliver their reuseables. The theory is that the processor will carefully separate the materials and send them all for reuse.

Sparks explains that in reality, many recycling companies that pick up carefully separated recycling containers at the curb or the central drop off point will throw away [send to the land fill] any plastic containers that do not look like the plastic in a milk bottle. Other plastics are recyclable, but many recycle companies do not bother to or even know what to look for in the materials. It can be done and communities should require it. “If the persons separating the containers turns any bottle upside down, the contents are numbered to tell them what it is made of,” says Sparks. The plastic materials are listed in a grid of 1 to 7 per their chemical contents, but the processors don’t need to know what they mean. Just numbering receptacle containers to match the numbers on the bottoms of the containers could facilitate recovery of the materials by the processing persons, if the companies organize.

This does not mean that we shouldn’t bother recycling. It means that someone needs to improve the process in the community. Ask questions of your recycling company. The materials are needed for reuse and the companies need to expand their categories of truly recycled materials to include more plastics.

However, there is a further problem: product containers can hold different materials. “The cap can be metal, the body plastic and the collar metal, which means the container must be broken apart and the pieces placed in different bins for recycling,” says Sparks. Who

Petersen's spa's recycling policy includes a reward for clients who hang onto and bring back their empty containers. "We always reward them with an offer of a longer massage..."

takes on the task? If the recycling company is responsible, the cost of recycling skyrockets. If a spa sorts the materials before pick-up time it must be committed to the process, as it takes valuable hands-on time needed elsewhere in the spa. And if the consumer must do it at home for home care products, it simply will not get done. At least, not where the consumers are on the recycling issue right now. The alternative? The containers should be made from one material, usually plastic, to make the process more efficient.

### Beyond green

For some, recycling is about more than just environmental economy. Robin Petersen, Beautiful Skin, Olympia, WA, recycles because it is the responsible thing to do. "We recycle everything, paper, glass, plastic, everything possible in bins in the facility and actively try to reduce our waste as much as possible," she says. But she has also found it to be a surprisingly effective internal marketing tool. "When we sell products to clients, we ask them to bring back the empty containers for us to recycle for them," says Peterson. "Then we remind them during each reminder call to bring their empties in and they love that." Returning the empty containers has an added purpose. "Our product company uses airless pumps that allow 100 percent of the product to be used so we always open the pump to see if there is any left. Then if there is, we close it back up and suggest they use the rest. They like that too—it shows them we care about them."

Petersen's spa's recycling policy includes a reward for clients who return their empty containers. "We always reward them with an offer of a longer massage, five or ten minutes, if they  
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Ask your skin care company, "Can your product containers be thrown away without taking them apart?" They will get the hint.



bring back their empties and they always like that. They ooohhh and aaahhh over the extra hands-on time, saying it makes it worth it," says Petersen. She also believes the policies remind her clients to recycle. They think, "If skin care product bottles and tubes can be recycled... maybe it's time to get going on recycling at home." Petersen believes recycling works for her in many ways, but "the most important thing is the environmental advantage," she says.

Petersen's product packaging is all plastic so can be easily recycled. "We don't have to take them apart as the product line I use purposely designed its product packaging to be easily recyclable," she says. Ask your skin care company, "Can your product containers be thrown away without taking them apart?" They will get the hint.

### Lifestyle choice

Despite the currently noncommitted consumers and the expense, some skin care manufacturers, small or large, are going to sustainable and/or recyclable packaging and materials. As they do, they will be ready when consumers become more aware, recycling becomes easier and more efficient and it becomes a lifestyle choice for a large number of consumers. Then, the inevitable question, "Is your packaging recyclable?" will be heard just as often as, "Are your products natural?" and the skin care companies will be able to answer with a resounding, "Yes!" Then it is up to consumers to do their part. ■

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