

PRESS INFORMATION

German Packaging Institute (dvi)

Berlin, 24 March 2021



Resounding public verdict: packaging is more sustainable and better than ever before.

The latest results of a representative population survey commissioned by the German Packaging Institute (Deutsches Verpackungsinstitut e. V. (dvi)) show that the multitude of innovations in the field of sustainable packaging in recent years are being well received by consumers. Nearly half of respondents – 44% – perceive clear progress in environmental friendliness of packaging, and only 15.7% see it as having regressed. Moreover, three out of four respondents, 74.6%, confirm that this progress has been achieved either with no compromise in functionality and convenience – or even enhancing it. Even so, the dvi recommends further measures to implement the circular economy in packaging, and use of objective life cycle assessments to evaluate sustainability.

“The packaging industry and its products are systemically important. Hygiene, health and safety of supply for the population have top priority, particularly in these times of pandemic,” says Kim Cheng, Managing Director of the German Packaging Institute. “That’s why there has been no lockdown within the industry. Staff are doing an outstanding job under these immensely difficult pandemic conditions. And even in these times, they don’t let up one little bit on the accomplishments and expectations on their products. The industry’s innovative work continues unabated, particularly with regard to the sustainability of packaging. We therefore wanted to know how the work is being viewed in people’s minds, and to what extent. What do our citizens say about the evolution in packaging in terms of sustainability, functionality and convenience?”

Sustainability, functionality and packaging effort

44.0% of respondents say that, in their experience, packaging has become more sustainable in the last 2-3 years. 26.4% see no change. Only 15.7% see a regression in terms of environmental friendliness. 14.0% have no opinion on the development.

That progress in environmental friendliness does not come at the expense of functionality and convenience, said 49.8% of those surveyed. 24.8% even see significant progress in terms of hygiene, product protection, safety and convenient handling. Only 14.9% see a regression in this area. 10.6% cannot assess the development.

Kim Cheng is pleased that “the numerous and varied sustainable innovations of the industry in recent years are being recognised by consumers. The advances range from material and energy savings, to the use of modified or new materials, to improved processes and technologies, and intelligent designs for recycling.” The dvi managing director sees it as crucial that “for all the environmental progress we have made, we have not lost sight of the core functions of packaging. Packaging is becoming more sustainable, and at the same time getting ever better at fulfilling its purpose. It ensures hygiene, protects goods from damage and spoilage and makes them durable, transportable and safe to use.”

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Need for action in circular economy and life cycle assessments

“We need to be especially responsible with packaging, not least because we simply can’t do without it,” says Cheng. “Used packaging should therefore not become a burden once it has done its job. On the contrary, it must be collected, sorted and recycled. That is why we must focus our sustainability work on the recyclability of packaging. Recycling is what it’s all about. But we also need an objective and generally valid model for assessing packaging’s sustainability. There is no way around life cycle assessments here. With this in mind, we have formulated four recommendations for action.”

Life cycle assessments

Kim Cheng: “Politicians and NGOs alike must make their decisions and demands on an ecological factual basis. Image-driven commitment to a particular material or type of packaging is counter-productive. Headline politics won’t get us anywhere. A proper life cycle assessment must include, for example: the material used in production; the amount and type of energy used in production as well as in recycling; the weight and volume of the packaging as a factor in transport; the transport routes within the value chain; and the use of water or chemicals for production or cleaning in the case of reusable packaging – and this for several life cycles of the packaging if necessary. These life cycle assessments must ultimately be driven by the Federal Environment Agency. Politicians must not shy away from their responsibility here. They must decide on the factors that are critical to assess sustainability and to what degree.”

Increase use of recycled material

Kim Cheng: “The use of recycled material is central. When it comes to plastics in particular, we can only fully close the loop if the material is not only collected and recycled, but the recyclate is also used for new packaging. The circle can only be closed when there is a functioning market for recyclate. This area in particular needs sustained political commitment. There are various models for promoting the use of recycled materials. There will be no one solution that takes all interests into account. Nevertheless, it is vital that there is a solution. We need a clear route map that gives planning certainty, guarantees quality and product safety of the recyclate and significantly increases the amount of recyclate used.”

Development of the infrastructure

Kim Cheng: “The circular economy infrastructure needs to be further developed. It does us little good if packaging is recyclable in theory, but recycling does not happen. We need greater capacity and we need innovative processes to be able to recycle materials that have not previously been recyclable. The companies in the industry are playing their part, for example through new technologies or invisible codes that identify the respective materials of a package and make efficient and seamless sorting possible. The EU also wants to make the circular economy a driver for job and economic growth as part of its Green Deal. We support that. It’s important to keep on making demands, of course – but encouragement is just as important!

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Getting consumers on board

Kim Cheng: “The circular economy can only function as a team made up of business, political and consumer players. Consumers are a crucial element. It’s only what they dispose of properly in the collection systems that eventually reaches the recycling plants. Their task must be made as easy as possible by clearly indicating on packaging how it is to be disposed of. It must also be possible to easily separate the different material components in packaging – ideally while it is still in the private household. Successful implementation of the circular economy relies on consumers finding it convenient to properly dispose of their packaging.”

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About the German Packaging Institute (dvi)

The German Packaging Institute is the only network within the packaging industry which unites its members from all levels of the value chain. The network takes on important ideas from this environment, also providing its own impetus in return. The dvi consists of numerous initiatives. In addition to the Dresden Packaging Conference, these include the Day of Packaging, the German Packaging Congress, the German Packaging Award, the Packaging Academy and PackVision. www.verpackung.org