

More than just a pretty wrapping: the essential role of packaging for spirits

On 21 September 2021, spiritsEUROPE invited representatives of spirit drinks producers, the European packaging associations and the European Commission to the webinar “More than just a pretty wrapping: the essential role of packaging for spirits”.

Improving the sustainability of spirits drinks across the value chain, including packaging as well as its end-of-life phase, is one of the key topics for spiritsEUROPE and its members. For spirit drinks, similar to many FMCG products, packaging is an indispensable part of the product which serves many more functions than simply acting as container to store, protect and transport liquid. Packaging is an integral part of spirit drinks that conveys important consumer information, serves the premiumization and brand elevation trends of fine spirits and helps to promote a culture of responsible drinking and portion control. There is no way to separate the drink from the packaging. spiritsEUROPE and its members are therefore fully committed to engaging in the future in the discussions on the PPWD's revision.



#SpiritOfSustainability

Following the welcoming statements by Ulrich Adam, Director General, spiritsEUROPE and Sarah Melina Siebel, Director Internal Market, spiritsEUROPE, **Francesca Stevens, EUROPEAN'S Managing Director**, delivered the first presentation of the afternoon. Under the headline “European Packaging Policies: challenges and opportunities, what is at stake for the industry?” the ca. 150 conference attendees were familiarized with the ins and outs of EU packaging legislation, its key role for the EU's sustainability agenda and the challenges and opportunities the upcoming revision holds.



As over 90% of all spirits drinks are packed in glass, **FEVE's Secretary General Adeline Farrelly**, is no newcomer to spiritsEUROPE events. Ms Farrelly introduced the Close the Glass Loop Platform to which spiritsEUROPE is a founding and board member. She highlighted the platform members' ambition to collect glass more and better, together.



Mike Turner, Managing Director at ECMA discussed the sustainability attributes of fibre packaging and the value folding cartons bring to spirits packaging and stressed that indeed, *“folding cartons are not just a pretty face – they also form an essential part of the product and retail supply chain”*.

David Buhe, Policy Officer for the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive at the European Commission's DG ENV, provided insider knowledge on the ongoing revision of PPWD which has the clear objective of proposing new ambitions on waste prevention. He explained the current thinking of the EU COM on objectives and emphasized the central role of the waste reduction targets. These are key for, a.o. the spirits sector as is the foreseen revision of the Essential Requirements. David explained that *"There is a strong expectation of European citizens. A huge majority (more than 90 %) of Europeans think protecting the environment is important. And waste management is one the main issue. The answer is to decouple waste from the economic growth. It means decoupling our consumption and production from resource use. We will have to reduce, reuse and recycle more. We also need upstream to produce more efficiently."*



Krassimira Kazashka, Technical Director at FEFCO, provided valuable insights regarding transport packaging in the frame of PPWD's review, focusing on the sustainability credentials and other benefits of cardboard corrugated packaging. She also elaborated on the challenges and opportunities for transport packaging related to the review of the Packaging Waste Directive.

As a representative of a spirit drinks producer, **Emily Lin, Global Packaging Sustainability Program Manager for Diageo,** addressed the unique challenges to the spirits industry and the opportunity to mainstream reuse models for a circular future. Emily stressed that *"Now more than ever, consumers and policy makers alike are expecting producers to reduce waste and take ownership of the end of life of packaging materials."* She explained that *"Reuse supply chain models are regionally adopted in developing economies but have yet to gain mainstream appeal in most developed markets. The variety of commerce channels, local and varied regulations on alcohol, global supply chains, and consumer behavior all impact the ease of implanting a more widespread reuse model."*



Finally, **Robert-Jan ter Morsche, European Director Product Stewardship & Packaging Policy, Ardagh Group & Beverage Executive Committee Chair, Metal Packaging Europe** concluded the first part of the conference with the following statement: *"Made from an infinitely recyclable material, the aluminium beverage can is easily sorted, efficiently recycled, and has high end-of-life economic value. This makes it a great example of a sustainable packaging option that is well-suited for 'real circularity'. To reach the Metal Packaging Europe goal of a 100% recycling rate for beverage cans by 2030, we therefore call on the entire value chain to work with us on maximising their circular potential and increasing the sustainability of our societies."*



During the panel discussion, conference speakers and attendees stressed the importance of ensuring that **the upcoming revision of the PPWD will formulate balanced, clear and meaningful policy objectives** which contribute to the EU's sustainability agenda and climate objectives whilst remaining fully compatible with fundamental Internal Market Principles. Most importantly, speakers stressed that **PPWD rules will need to consider that packaging plays a much broader role for FMCG products like spirits beyond the mere practical function of acting as a container to hold liquid:**

- packaging is part and parcel of the broad premiumization and brand elevation trend in spirits
- packaging plays an important role to cultivate and nurture responsible consumption patterns
- packaging is a key communications channel, conveying product-specific information to consumers
- packaging ensures the integrity of valuable products during transport and shipment.

To achieve these goals, spiritsEUROPE and its members are committed to playing an active role and to engaging as a constructive partner in the upcoming discussions on the future of Packaging and Packaging Waste.