



NVC NETHERLANDS PACKAGING CENTRE

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Participants at inspiration meeting are unanimous: A chain mindset is essential to improve sustainability

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Globally, the Netherlands is among the leaders when it comes to the sustainability of the packaging chain. To achieve even greater success in the future, all links in the chain must seek ways to collaborate and share their knowledge. A 'chain mindset' is needed across the board.

On Tuesday 8 September, the auditorium at the NVC Netherlands Packaging Centre in Gouda was the nerve centre of the Dutch packaging sector's discussions about sustainability. The occasion was the latest edition of the renowned NVC inspiration meetings, in which experts from various areas within the industry freely exchange their ideas. The theme this time was 'The effectiveness of Dutch policy on packaging and packaging waste'.

The setting

The experts who took part in the discussion were: Joan Hanegraaf, managing director and owner of plastic packaging manufacturer Oerlemans Packaging and chairman of NRK and NRK Packaging, the association for the rubber and plastics industry; Jan-Henk Welink, initiator of the Sustainable Resources Knowledge Platform from Delft University of Technology; Karen van de Stadt, packaging expert at the Dutch Institute of Sustainable Packaging (KIDV); Siem Haffmans, managing partner at Partners for Innovation and expert member of the KIDV's committee to evaluate the packaging industry's sustainability plans; and Alexander Lange, innovation manager at Milgro, a company specialised in waste prevention and resource management. The discussion was further attended by a select group of other interested participants, including Marc Pruijn and Suzan Akop from the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment (I&M).



The auditorium of the NVC Netherlands Packaging Centre was the scene for the inspiration meeting.

Sustainability Plans

The primary reason behind the theme of the inspiration meeting was the publication of the Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) in June, which was commissioned by the KIDV and executed by TNO and CE Delft. That study investigated the environmental impact of the entire range of targets in the Packaging Agreement 2013-2022 (including the possible abolition of the deposit on large PET bottles) in comparison with the situation prior to the Agreement. This was done in relation to the Packaging Agreement 2013-2022, in which the Dutch national government, the Dutch municipalities and the packaging industry have all agreed to work towards a number of targets in order to improve the sustainability of the packaging sector.

Deposits on plastic bottles

The EIA was commissioned to answer one crucial question in particular: has the packaging industry met the seven agreed performance criteria to enable the government to abolish the deposit-return system for large PET bottles? Those performance criteria included tackling litter, a minimum for recycled material in PET bottles for soft drinks, banning plastic carrier bags from supermarket checkouts, and banning PVC packaging from supermarket shelves unless it is unavoidable. The EIA was also taken into account in the 2015 decision about deposits on PET bottles. The conclusion was clear and irrevocable: the packaging industry has met six of the seven performance criteria, failing only on the issue of banning PVC packaging from supermarket shelves. As a result, the deposit-return system will remain in place for large PET bottles and the packaging industry is not allowed to abolish it. According to the discussion group around the table, it is unrealistic to think that all PVC packaging will disappear from supermarket shelves. At present, the technology is not sufficiently advanced to offer alternatives for all uses of PVC, and this is especially true in the case of medical packaging. Furthermore, such alternatives are not expected to be developed in the

foreseeable future or, as Joan Hanegraaf put it, 'I don't know how long I'll live, but I know it won't happen in my lifetime. Our country is not an island.'

None of the discussion group actually seemed to lament the fact that the deposit system will remain intact. Hanegraaf: 'The goal is high-quality PET recycling; the deposit is only a means to an end. The plastics industry itself has actually always been open to a good alternative, but in neighbouring countries we're seeing a trend towards increased implementation of deposit systems.' Lange even thinks that the soft drinks industry needs the deposit system to ensure it receives enough recycled PET so that it can integrate sufficient rPET in PET bottles. 'If you don't have that, the price of rPET will go sky high.'

On schedule

It was not possible to include anything about the industry sustainability plans called for in the Packaging Agreement in the recent EIA. During the meeting, however, Van de Stadt reported that three sustainability plans have actually already been assessed by KIDV and submitted to I&M. These are now regarded as valid for the relevant sector, namely for the fruit and vegetable sector, the food and pet food industry, and the retail and e-retail sector. Van de Stadt expects that by the end of this year plans will have been published for over 80% of the total packaging weight on the market.

Looking beyond borders

The main topic during the inspiration session was the matter of how to make the packaging chain even more sustainable. The objective is twofold: environmental benefits on the one hand, and an additional flow of – recycled – materials to compensate for the increasing scarcity of raw materials on the other. Van de Stadt and Lange were both in favour above all of more analysis in the chain as the basis for decisions about a specific type of packaging. Van de Stadt: 'I advocate the sharing of knowledge so that it reaches all links in the chain and informed choices can be made. All too often, companies tell us that they want to become more sustainable, but they don't know where to start. There should be a gradual shift towards a situation in which sustainability is embedded in a company's DNA, so that each consumer product comes in the ideal packaging. But great strides have already been made, such as with the introduction of the sustainability plans.'

Welink concurred: 'There is a lot of knowledge to be gained if you look beyond the borders of your own company or industry. Throughout the entire chain, from materials suppliers to recyclers and other industries, everyone holds a small piece of the puzzle. If all the links in the chain would gather around the table, they would find new solutions together.'

'Traditionally, the materials knowledge within a company has always come from that company's packaging specialist,' agreed Hanegraaf. 'But a lot of knowledge about the materials can also be obtained from the materials suppliers. Take advantage of them. The same also holds true for I&M, with whom we have cooperated well in recent years.'

Design for Recycling

Haffmans mentioned another form of a chain mindset, namely 'design for recycling'. 'This approach ensures that packaging becomes a normal part of society rather than a negative issue.' In that context, Hanegraaf advocated that in terms of sustainability the main focus should be on product/packaging combinations rather than packaging alone, commenting that much can also still be done to improve the image of packaging. 'The packaging accounts for just 5 percent of the total CO2 footprint of the product/packaging combination.'

Packaging is primarily functional; it is necessary to keep products fresh and safe to eat, which in turn benefits the environment too.'

Because of the success of this meeting, the same topic will be discussed in 2016 as well in an NVC Inspiration meeting. Make a note in your diary: Tuesday, September 7th, 2016. For more information [click here](#).