

PACKAGING

on one project to replace a glass jar and another to replace a metal can for snack products."

Package cost savings will be slight concedes Joiner, but volume reduction will produce freight and warehouse savings in addition to source reduction.

Cost is often the biggest driver in source reduction, notes COPE's Young. Often that is achieved by incremental downgauging not perceived by the consumer. Microwave popcorn bags have decreased in material weight from 60-lb. paper to 46-48-lb., observes Art Kucksdorf, vice president and general manager of American Packaging Corp.'s consumer & industrial bag div., Story City, Iowa. The patch of susceptor film has dropped from 48 gauge to 36 gauge as well.

Candy bar wraps see similar reductions, notes Mike Miller, marketing manager at Milprint, Oshkosh, Wis., with outer layers dropping from

100 gauge to 75, 70 or 60 and inner layers from 55 to 43

"Our on-going efforts have reduced the amount of material per package by as much as 25%," asserts Dennis Love, president of Printpack Inc., Atlanta.

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*a top executive at a major
snack food converter*

"We're ready with lighter 24-gauge films," claims John Holovach, new product development manager, Toray Plastics (America) Inc., North Kingstown, R.I. He notes that most converters have reduced films by 15%

to 60 gauge for chips, cookies, baked goods and confectionery.

LET'S GO OVER IT AGAIN

Most snack food cartons use recycled board, states Thomas Brown, president and chief executive officer of Carastar Industries, Austell, Ga. Many folding carton makers now have an integrated process for producing recycled board, beginning with collection and carrying it through to mills and converting plants. Systems are designed so that nearly any mix of pre- or post-consumer waste can be handled.

With solid bleached sulfate (SBS) board used for hot snacks, recycling is a bit trickier, says Patrick McGee, product manager of New York-based Westvaco's Printkote Eagle line. Westvaco invested more than two years to develop a commercial process to produce an up-to-30% post-consumer recycled content SBS. Special patented techniques had to be

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developed to process reclaim to achieve food-grade purity, consistent whiteness and strength. At a very modest premium, the product has been well-received for a variety of food and medical products.

"Recycling programs for flexible film are a farce," declares a top executive at a major snack food converter, "It's just due to short-term political influence."

"Sometimes a packager is forced to use a 'recyclable' package due to legislation, but the package isn't recycled enough to overcome the source reduction available from flexible packaging," adds Love. Because of source reduction, flexible packages have been exempt from recycled content legislation in California and Oregon.

Snack packers are interested in using recycled materials but are not willing to pay more, says Jay Yakich, director of sales at Seville Flexpack, Oak Creek, Wis. They are also concerned about what consumers will think about the cleanliness of post-consumer waste.

Such concerns are unjustified, says William Nelson, marketing manager of ICI Americas, Wilmington, Del., since FDA has fully approved ICI's PET film with 25% post-consumer. He also believes that some food companies will pay a premium to provide a marketing advantage.

LET'S WRAP IT DIFFERENTLY

Consumers could be composting future snack food packages made from Minneapolis-based Cargill Inc.'s EcoPLAx polylactide resin. Now used in sutures that dissolve in the body, Cargill has discovered a process to reportedly produce it competitively with established plastic materials. Cargill is so confident, it has built a plant to produce 8 million lbs. annually from corn-based raw materials. The clear, glossy resin has an excellent moisture barrier and won't come apart on the shelf, since degradation requires oxygen, moisture and bacteria (normally present in sufficient quantities only in compost piles).

Ultimately, the package could be

eaten right along with the cookies or crackers bought at the vending machine or convenience store.

In other developments, Scientists at University of California at Davis have developed a tasteless dairy by-product food wrap, while Clemson University, has developed corn- and wheat-based wraps for animal feed.

No, snack packagers haven't for-

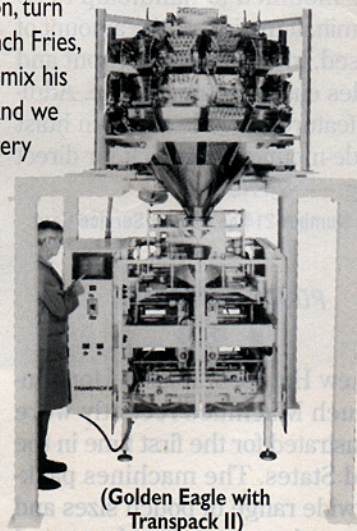
gotten the three "Rs" of environmental packaging: reduce, reuse and recycle. They're just working quietly and thoroughly to make sure snacks make it to consumers with taste, texture and good value. ●

Huston Keith of Keymark Associates is a marketing and packaging consultant in Marietta, Ga.



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