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Petcore announces first test results for recyclable barrier technologies while banning the use of OPS sleeves

Petcore is a non-profit trade association fostering the economic collection, recovery and recycling of post consumer PET containers in Europe.

Last year Petcore published its Guidelines and Test Protocols for additives and barrier materials, in order to assess such technologies on their recycling properties. The emergence of several barrier materials for PET containers used in beverages has recently caught the attention of the trade press. Beverages such as fruit juices, dairy products, beer, and even some carbonated soft drinks, rely on enhanced barrier properties now offered on the market. Petcore's Guidelines offer product developers a perfect tool to assess the recyclability profile of barrier solutions.

The first results are now available. The following barrier materials passed the tests with flying colours:

- Glaskin
- Bestpet

Dr. A. Opschoor, Technical Director and member of Petcore's Expert Evaluation Committee commented: "Products that pass this rigorous test regime can be recycled using existing recycling practices, without any difficulties. We are very pleased with these results. It opens up new beverage markets with innovative solutions. Tests on several other barrier materials are in the pipeline; this is just the beginning".

Petcore's Expert Evaluation Committee has also reached a verdict on shrink and stretch sleeves. Dr. Opschoor: "Sleeves are a fantastic tool for brand owners to expand their abilities to reach out to their consumers. Sleeves provide sublime marketing power in times when the consumers decide on their product of choice while walking through a supermarket, in a matter of seconds. However, using the wrong materials could also render the PET container utterly un-recyclable." "We distinguish between components that accommodate recycling, those that cannot be recycled and must be removed, and those that effectively damage recycling. Our Committee decided that we should only ban components, additives or barrier technologies, which cause real damage to the PET recycling process. We must not forget that nowadays, 25 percent of all European PET bottles are collected, sorted, and recycled. This is an important achievement, and we cannot allow the use of wrong materials to interfere with this".

Based on this advice, Petcore announced today at the Barrier PET Packaging conference in Brussels that oriented polystyrene (OPS) sleeves will be banned from the European PET bottle market. Mr. Koelewijn, Director General of Petcore, placed this decision in the context of current recycling practices. "PET reclaim processes rely on the physical properties of various polymers. OPS sinks in water float-sink tanks used in PET recycling processes, together with the PET flakes. From then on, it becomes very difficult to remove OPS. That was one of the reasons why we banned the use of PVC components years ago".

PET recycling processes in Europe differ from those in the United States and Japan. Virtually all European plants use wet grinding, making it very difficult to sort out those polymer films and

labels that do not float in water. In the United States and in Japan, most PET recycling plants are based on dry grinding processes, making it relatively easy to remove films by air separation.