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FEICA position on biodegradability and compostability of packaging adhesives

FEICA, the Association of the European Adhesive & Sealant Industry, is a multinational association representing the European adhesive and sealant industry. Today's membership stands at 15 National Association Members, 24 Direct Company Members and 19 Affiliate Company Members. The European market for adhesives and sealants is currently worth almost 17 billion euros. With the support of its national associations and several direct and affiliated members, FEICA coordinates, represents and advocates the common interests of our industry throughout Europe. In this regard, FEICA works with all relevant stakeholders to create a mutually beneficial economic and legislative environment.

Background

One of the focus areas of the 2015 EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy is plastics. Following the growing awareness of the packaging supply chain, the types of plastic packaging marketed as 'biodegradable' or '(home) compostable' has increased significantly and adhesives producing companies receive more and more customer requests regarding the biodegradability and compostability of their products.

This raises the question of whether or not these types of packaging are beneficial in the context of a circular economy. The European Commission subcontracted Eunomia¹ to carry out a study on the 'Relevance of Biodegradable and Compostable Consumer Plastic Products and Packaging in a Circular Economy' with the aim to investigate the possible implications of the use of biodegradable and compostable products.

Content of the study

The report concludes that: "At this stage the evidence is weak in favour of any particular agronomic benefit associated with compostable plastic material in compost or digestate. Some carbon from the biodegradable plastics appears to be incorporated into the biomass but at least half is 'lost' to CO₂ air emissions. This leads to the conclusion that material choices for products and packaging should prioritise recyclability over compostability. Benefits of compostable items are seen where it increases the collection of organic waste and its diversion from residual waste or

¹ www.eunomia.co.uk/

where it is helping to reduce contamination of compost (i.e. using compostable plastic in products which are often thrown into compost).

Several studies also suggest a perception amongst consumers that 'biodegradable' or 'compostable' product is more easily littered as it is thought to be less impactful.

Conclusion

The Eunomia study 'Relevance of Biodegradable and Compostable Consumer Plastic Products and Packaging in a Circular Economy' concludes that the evidence for benefits associated with compostable plastic material is weak. Therefore, material choices for products and packaging should prioritise recyclability over compostability.

The adhesives industry is committed to positively contributing to the transition towards a circular economy and is making considerable efforts to work with its supply chain to better understand and mitigate the possible impact of adhesives on recycling of plastics packaging. Benefits of biodegradable and compostable adhesives depend on their applications. When the adhesive is applied on packaging that can be recycled, the adhesive should not adversely impact upon the recyclability of packaging. In special cases, where the packaging is intended to be composted, the adhesive should not negatively impact on the compliance of the packaging with the relevant norm on composting packaging (EN 13432).

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