



FULL CIRCLE ON CANS

AN OPINION ARTICLE BY THE UK CAN MAKERS

The Circular Economy, the idea where resources are used, recovered and then regenerated, is very much on the radar right now as one of the European Commission's 2017 stated key priorities. Both product and packaging manufacturers are vying to come up with even better environmental credentials and innovations. Metals, as a uniquely Permanently Available Material (PAM), are well placed to contribute to increased recovery rates as they can be easily recycled to make new products and materials again and again - forever. But why does this matter and how well are metals, like the aluminium in drinks cans, placed to make a major contribution to the Circular Economy?

Already by 2016 seven out of every ten aluminium drink cans sold in the UK are recycled. This 70% milestone, recently announced by Alupro, makes a major contribution to the European metal packaging sector's ambition to reach and exceed an average 80% metal packaging recycling rate by 2020¹¹.

So what other targets have been set?

The European Commission's Circular Economy Package (CEP) sets common targets to increase recycling and therefore ultimately stop precious materials going to landfill.

Here are a few goals – helping drive towards the circular economy:

- A common EU target for recycling 65% of municipal waste by 2030
- A common EU target for recycling 75% of packaging waste by 2030
- A proposed target of 75% of packaging waste prepared for reuse and recycling by 2025, rising to 85% by 2030
- A binding landfill target to reduce landfill to a maximum of 10% of all waste by 2030
- A ban on landfilling of separately collected waste
- Economic incentives for producers to put greener products on the market, and support recovery and recycling schemes

Permanently available - perfect for a circular economy

All of this is great news for the drinks can example. Aluminium and steel can be recycled again and again without losing any of their structural integrity - known as 'real' recycling. With most other materials there's a limit to how often they can be recycled to the same quality. This isn't the case with metals.

If you heat aluminium or steel 'scrap' in a recycling facility to the point where it melts, what comes out is completely the same as what went in. Metal is unalterable structurally, technically speaking it is an element, and that's what makes it an ideal building block for a circular economy.

So, their endless recyclability makes drinks cans a valuable material source for reintroduction into the economy to make new cans or other products, such as kettles or engine components. That's why we call the metals in drinks cans a Permanently Available Material, and what could be more sustainable than permanent? It also happens to be the perfect packaging solution to help the UK reach the EU's Waste Framework Directive target of a minimum of 50% of all household waste to be reused and/or recycled by 2020.

Promoting recycling

75% of all aluminium ever produced is still in use today. It's also good to know that recycling metals saves between 70% and 90% of the energy used to produce new production quality metals.

¹ Metal Packaging Europe - <http://www.metalpackagingeurope.org/sustainability>

Many industry-supported recycling schemes across Europe are showing consumers how to recycle even more. [Every Can Counts](#) and [MetalMatters](#) are great examples - campaign that encourages more consumers to recycle cans when they're at work, at home or out and about.

Then there's the Extended Producer Responsibility (ERP) scheme which supports increased recycling and reuse amongst manufacturers. ERP fees are based on real end-of-life costs, with recyclability factored in. So, producers are charged lower fees for using metals such as aluminium or steel, which are easy to collect, sort and recycle.

Metal Recycles Forever

Metal Packaging Europe (MPE) has been busy drawing attention to the continuous lifecycle of metal with a recycling mark, and message, for drinks cans - *Metal Recycles Forever*. The infinity loop image is designed to engage consumers and remind them of the value of continuously recycling metal.

Richard Burhouse, Managing Director of UK-based craft brewer, Magic Rock Brewing Co, is an early supporter: "We're very happy to include the MPE recycling mark on our cans. We know that customers are increasingly concerned about environmental issues and it makes sense to encourage recycling participation by advertising the benefits of aluminium on the cans... Anything that promotes consumer responsibility is to be applauded in my opinion."

Permanent materials are the ideal building blocks for a circular economy, with both packagers and drinks brands reaping the rewards from their increased use, whilst working towards a more sustainable, innovative and economically efficient Europe.

Global resources are limited, but society's demands are increasing. So, managing resources efficiently must be a top priority. Metal, as a highly recycled permanent material, saves on raw materials, energy consumption and CO₂ emissions. In fact, the aluminium reprocessing industry has cut CO₂ emissions by 50% since 1997 (source: EAA). Almost 75% of metal packaging is recycled in Europe and the drinks can aims to continue to contribute as the most recycled pack type out there.