

Packaging

Stop and think about the amount of packaging you buy, use and see in a week. To start, look at the weekly groceries. After the food and other purchases arrive in your home, they are automatically emptied out of their packets into cupboards, refrigerators and freezers. The original packaging thereby instantly becomes waste. Examining this garbage would illustrate the needless use of plastic film in wrapping fruit and vegetables, boxboard containers designed solely to catch the consumers eye and an array of one use packaging.

Now consider the packaging consumed during the next six days. Tally up the resources used to make half a dozen lunches: individual cheese slices wrapped in plastic, bars of granola covered in foil lined paper, sandwich bags and yogurt cups. In preparing a well balanced meal how many boxes and "boil in the bag" pouches were tossed into the garbage? If you eat at a fast food restaurant, consider the paper and plastic foam that keeps your food warm. From the time a burger is placed in either type of package to the time it is consumed, the packet's useful life is only 15 minutes. Look at the boxes used to contain the soap and toothpaste we all use daily. Try to count the number of plastic and paper bags you receive to package the packaging you have bought.

Since the 1960's, the amount of packaging in garbage has increased 80% in North America. This type of material is now responsible for 50% of the volume of our municipal solid waste. How did this form of garbage grow to become such a problem? The packaging industry itself lead businesses to believe that certain products were essential. The right tube, tub or other container would reduce theft, breakage, spoilage, tampering and, ironically, waste.

Some of these packages serve to hold items which could not be sold otherwise, such as powders or liquids. Other practical reasons include; safety, preservation, and protection. An example of safety is the need to wrap razor blades. Some fruits must be canned to enjoy them long after the growing season. Medical supplies and pharmaceuticals need protection to keep their sterility and quality intact.

However, most of today's packaging is merely another form of advertising. The graphics and bright colours lure a person into buying a certain item. Even the form of container itself can be used to entice the consumer. Fabric softener and liquid detergents are routinely released in "new and improved" jugs and bottles; the contents have not changed, merely the container. Convenience, that for the most part is a mask for laziness, also feeds the ever increasing demand for "improved" forms of *blister packs* and similar products.

