

Packaging (cont.)

Packaging adds hidden costs, both monetary and environmental. You, the consumer, absorb these expenses. Energy and resources are required to make containers. Once manufactured, the packages must be transported, first to the wholesaler to fill, then to the retailer to sell and finally to the consumer who buys the packages. At the cash register the buyer pays for this production and transportation. After serving their limited purpose the empty or used plastic trays or similar items need to be collected. Whether it is for recycling or, more likely, disposal, the gathering of these materials costs money. Vehicles, workers, landfill maintenance and the acquisition of new disposal sites are normally paid through tax money. Where does this money come from? The public, the same group who bought the packages and their contents in the first place. From the resources that are used in production, to the energy consumed in their manufacture and up to the space needed for disposal, packaging has a heavy environmental toll. This is a senseless strain on the Earth considering the short time and questionable nature in which these items are used.

Individuals can influence the over use of packaging. First, refuse to buy any product that is wrapped or contained unnecessarily. Tell the store manager or write to the company explaining your actions. Mail any excess packaging back to the parent company or leave it at the place of purchase so either enterprise is responsible for disposal. This action, if done by enough people, is the most concrete method of illustrating to the retailers and manufacturers the headache of dealing with unnecessary trash.

Purchase material, you are sure to use, in the largest size possible. Rather than buying one bottle of shampoo every month get two of the commercial sized jugs. Be sure to use all the shampoo otherwise you are not really reducing packaging. Shop at locations where food can be purchased in large quantities or small amounts, depending upon your needs. A good example is to shop at a bulk food retailer for things that are used often, like cereal and flour. If you only require three oranges, go to a market or fruit stand rather than buy a tray, cellophane and the fruit. No matter what you are shopping for or where you are, bring your own bags or boxes. If the sales person offers a bag of any size or material to carry just a few items, politely decline; there is no reason why a person cannot put one or two smaller purchases in his or her pocket, along with the receipt.

Use your money to let companies that are guilty of excessive packaging know you are unhappy. Switch to a comparable product that is more environmentally friendly. Write to both corporations telling the one you no longer plan to buy their goods and why, then commend the other on their efforts.

Some help, hopefully, from our nation's government is on the way. In the past, the federal government regulated packaging while municipalities were responsible for the collection and disposal of garbage. The new National Packaging Protocol¹ is designed to be more sensitive to all problems, at all levels.

The most powerful tools are the average Canadian's buying dollar and the consumers right to choose. We have the final say in what is or is not bought and accepted. The public dictates markets not business and industry. No one wants to put the packaging industry out of business, but the time has come for us to say enough is enough. If the industry cannot control itself then we must help it to do so. People of all ages have the power and ability to make a difference.