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Corrugated LCA Update

Brian O'Banion, vice president of the Fibre Box Association, provided an update on the industry's corrugated life-cycle analysis (LCA), at last week's AICC Fall Meeting in Las Vegas. The study was commissioned by The Corrugated Packaging Alliance (CPA) and conducted according to ISO 14000/14040 guidelines, which include critical review by a panel of third-party experts. Brian reported that the LCA is now undergoing its final review with the panel.

The LCA will help answer the growing number of questions being asked about packaging by customers, retailers and consumers. The aim of the study is to generate high-quality, up-to-date data on the environmental impacts of corrugated packaging, Brian said.

It is intended to inform corrugated industry member companies and external stakeholders including retailers, CPGs, the U.S. LCI data base, design tools (such as COMPASS), NGOs (such as the Sustainable Packaging Coalition), EPA, the international corrugated community,



academics, LCA practitioners, software providers and packaging professionals who are required to understand and use the information in decision-making.

The study evaluates the performance of a U.S. industry-average corrugated container throughout its entire life cycle, “cradle-to-grave”. It includes data from 56 mills (95% of U.S. production) and 162 converting facilities (45%). The LCA specifically analyzed the impacts associated with the life cycle of a one-kilogram U.S. industry-average corrugated box.

Results

A “sneak peek” at some general findings were shared with the audience, while the final review is still in progress. The following graph illustrates the contribution of each life-cycle stage for each impact indicator. The containerboard mills (blue) dominate each impact indicator. Global warming potential (GWP) appears to be different, but it’s misleading, since the mills’ greenhouse gas emissions are almost completely offset by the carbon sequestration of the fiber. If sequestration wasn’t included, the mills’ GWP impact would be over four times the converting or end-of-life.

“However, we must note that the mills have significantly reduced their emissions / impact over time,” Brian noted. “For example, over 65% of the average containerboard mill’s energy comes from biomass, a

renewable energy. That’s why you see the dominance of the mills in the second bar for renewable energy.”

Brian provided some suggestions based on the study results for box plants looking to reduce their environmental impact. Specifically, he suggested they can:

- minimize and recycle waste
- minimize all inks, glues, coatings
- continue design focus on packaging reduction and fiber efficiency
- identify ways to reduce electricity, gas, steam or other energy use
- look for opportunities for non-fossil energy provision, e.g. wind, solar, biomass, hydro
- minimize transportation.

“Reducing environmental impacts can be thought of as an extension and natural outcome of running your plant more efficiently and effectively,” Brian advised.

The next step is to educate corrugated industry members about the LCA and provide some communication tools they can use in discussions with their customers, retailers, NGOs, and other interested stakeholders.



An introductory webinar explaining the LCA and related communication tools will launch the industry's new information campaign (date to be announced). The webinar is intended to help member companies understand how to communicate the results of the LCA, introduce materials and provide an opportunity for members to ask questions before external communications are released.

Communication materials will include a printed report on the life-cycle study, Q&A and fact sheets, a PowerPoint slide presentation, and a special website area. Also in early 2010, a television segment will broadcast on "Our Planet," airing nationally on FOX Business Network and regionally on CNN Headline News in many of the top 100 markets nationwide; video will be available for members' use. Meanwhile a new sustainability brochure, entitled "**Responsibility Starts Here,**" is available now.

The Corrugated Packaging Alliance is a joint industry initiative sponsored by the AF&PA, AICC and FBA.

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