

## Packaging and Labeling in Japan



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### Introduction

As with other aspects of environmental policy in Japan, limited natural resources and the limited availability of space for final disposal of waste are recognized drivers behind policies regarding packaging and labeling. Recycling laws, as they relate to packaging, are based on a waste classification system to determine which materials are recycled and by whom.

The first legislation addressing the issue of managing packing waste was the Law Concerning the Promotion of the Separation, Collection and Recycling of Container Packaging (Packaging Waste Management Law), enforced in 1997, an initiative of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). This establishes a shared responsibility approach to managing packaging waste with consumers responsible for separating waste for collection, municipalities responsible for its collection, and industry for recycling the collected materials. The Japan Containers and Packaging Recycling Association (JCPRA), a government designated organization, was established under the law with the objective of overseeing the waste packaging system. Labeling (marking and identification) provisions applicable to packaging, intended to facilitate the segregation and recycling process, are regulated under the Law for the Promotion of the Effective Utilization of Resources.

Although the law provides a framework for recycling packaging materials, the underlying intention of the law is to promote the use of packaging and containers that are reusable or, in cases where this is not possible, materials which are readily recyclable. If packaging materials are not readily recyclable, manufacturers are obliged to pay the associated costs for collection, sorting, transportation and recycling thereby providing financial incentives to encourage the use of reusable or easily recyclable packaging. The law limits industry's responsibility to recycle packaging with "industry" defined as packaging users and packaging manufacturers and includes packaging used to protect goods during transport.

The response from industry has focused on the design and function of packaging materials as opposed to systems and processes for disposal of packaging. Different industry groups have established sector wide Voluntary Action Plans which establish performance targets, for example the Soap and Detergent Association established a target for reducing plastic consumption in packaging by 30% by 2010. Industry associations representing the electronics sector have not taken an active role in terms of voluntary plans for packaging recycling but worked under the general plans of the Federation of Business. Industry associations have also taken various practical steps to promote recycling, for example the voluntary Corrugated Cardboard Recycling Symbol developed by the Japan Corrugated Case Association (JCCA). In the consumer electronics sector, a key focus has been on material selection and re-design of packaging for example replacing expanded polystyrene with reusable airbags during transport and replacing plastic cushioning (expanded polystyrene) with cardboard.

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