

Communities of people who want to bring original thought to a mainstream audience all too often commit a fundamental mistake - they believe everyone who consumes their message is familiar with it. Originality needs familiarity to succeed. For sustainability to become a way of life, consumers need to understand it from their perspective, as simply put as possible, so that they can diffuse their learnings to their circles, who let others know, and so on, till what they do is what everyone does.

Until we explain sustainable packaging in a simple way, the Mr. Blue Fishes we would like to save, stand no chance. So, here's our attempt to demystify sustainability in packaging.

Starting from the top, it's important to understand what sustainability means.

According to The Sustainable Packaging Coalition® (SPC) sustainable packaging is sourced responsibly, designed to be effective and safe throughout its life cycle, meets market criteria for performance and cost, is made entirely using renewable energy, and once used, is recycled efficiently to provide a valuable resource for subsequent generations.

Wow.

Demystified, making new packaging from old packaging helps our planet.

Most plastic packaging is single use, it doesn't disappear, practically never reused and only 10% of it is recycled. So you have to make new plastic from scratch. Paper, not so much.

Which is where our friends recyclable, biodegradable and compostable make an appearance.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines recyclable as "to sort and collect rubbish in order to treat it and produce useful materials that can be used again".

We could argue "rubbish", but we won't. Recycling has been made simple enough for people to understand, which is why we do it. Maybe not enough, but we do.

Wait for it.

"Biodegradable products are those that can be consumed by living microorganisms like fungi or bacteria. This helps to break them down into compounds that are found in nature" But even this definition is incomplete because there are no industry standards, no defined time frame for degrading. In time everything degrades.

“Compostable is used to describe a product that can disintegrate into non-toxic, natural elements. It also does so at a rate consistent with similar organic materials. Compostable products require microorganisms, humidity, and heat to yield a finished compost product (CO₂, water, inorganic compounds, and biomass).”

And yet, we wonder why this isn't mainstream.

Demystified, nature has ways to make some packaging disappear without causing any harm.

Plastic packaging isn't one of these. Which is why the equivalent of one garbage truck filled with plastic is dumped into your oceans every single minute. Not starting now, this started happening 20 years ago.

We hope it's getting simpler.

So, what packaging should you look for to know it's something that's not been made from scratch and once you're done with it, can be reused or disappear harmlessly?

1. **Cardboard:** 90% of it is recycled, and even what makes its way to our oceans, doesn't harm them.
2. **Paper:** recycled, handmade or paper from alternate sources such as stone, waste fabric,
3. **Compostable plastic:** made from things like corn and potatoes and turn into carbon dioxide and water when composted
4. **Oxo-biodegradable plastic:** plastic that has been treated so that it becomes biodegradable if it's not recycled.
5. **Glass**
6. **Aluminium**

Yes, plastics make a third of this list. The thing is, how do you know if a product does what it says?

Enter certifications and standards. There are several agencies whose work helps us know if our packaging is naughty or nice. Trust products with these certifications printed on them:

1. **FSC**, Forest Stewardship Council certification - ensures that products come from responsibly managed forests that provide environmental, social and economic benefits.
2. **PEFC**, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification - similar to FSC is a leading global alliance dedicated to promoting sustainable forest management through independent third-party certification.

3. **ASTM**, the American Society for Testing and Materials. The ASTM D6400 standard is intended to establish the requirements of materials and products, including packaging made from plastics, as compostable, breaking down into non toxic compounds within 180 days.

ASTM D6868 similar to ASTM D6400 but for multi layer packaging such as film or coating applied to food packaging

4. **ISO**, International Organisation for Standardisation, ISO 17088 is equivalent to the ASTM D6400
5. **European Standard** EN13432 lays down the criteria for compostability requiring the same timeline and results as ASTM D6400. Plastics certified according to EN 13432 can be recognised by the “Seedling” logo
6. **Australian Standard**, the AS 4736-2006 requires a minimum of 90% biodegradation of plastic materials within 180 days in compost without any toxic effect.

AS 5810-2010 uses TUV Austria OK compost HOME certificate as the basis for for its criteria which require materials to biodegrade in ambient (20°C and 30°C) temperature within a year and the resulting substrate will not harm plant growth.

Certification - Not to be confused with the standard itself. Accredited independent third party organisations will issue a certification if the products meet the above standards for compostability

The most prominent certifying bodies around the world are:

1. **BPI**, Biodegradable Products Institute is a multi-stakeholder association that verifies the compostability of manufacturers’ products. BPI is the only North American third-party verification of the ASTM D6400 or D6868 standards for compostable products. Identified by the BPI Compostable Logo
2. **TUV AUSTRIA TUV** short for German: *Technischer Überwachungsverein* TRANSLATED Technical Inspection Association independent certification body in Germany and Austria, operating throughout Europe. The organisations include TÜV Nord, TÜV Rheinland and TÜV SÜD as well as the smaller independent TÜV Thüringen, TÜV Saarland and TÜV Austria

TUV Austria formerly Vincotte can award the seedling logo and the OK compost INDUSTRIAL logo. It is also the only certifying body to issue an OK HOME compost logo for compostable products

3. **DIN CERTO-** DIN CERTCO is the certification body of **TÜV Rheinland Group**. They have also partnered with BPI in North America, ABA in Australia and can offer the seedling logo certification for bioplastics as well as FSC, PEFC for paper

7. **ABA, Australasian Bioplastics Association**, As the peak body for the bioplastics industry in Australia and New Zealand it administers a voluntary verification scheme for compliance with the Australian Standard 4736-2006, as well as the Home Composting Australian Standard, AS 5810-2010. They give out the seedling logo as well the Home compostable logo.

Ok, so you probably won't always be turning your packaging over and checking if it has these certifications, but if it does have these logos you can trust you're making a difference.

Start small, think big and spread the word. We hope this article helps in that journey.